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Chapter One

Bluefur looked up at Sunstar through narrowed eyes. She was too late. He was going to announce Thistleclaw as Deputy and the Clans would be doomed.

She turned and saw Goosefeather, the Clan medicine cat, snarling with an unfocused gaze. She didn't know if he was looking at her or at the evil warrior but felt like she should shrink in shame either way. Goosefeather's eyes focused again and he glared at Bluefur with fire in his eyes. She lowered her head. She had failed.

"I say these words before StarClan, so they will hear and approve my words. The new Deputy of ThunderClan, the cat who will replace Tawnyspots as my second in command, will be Thistleclaw."

Looking right at the new Deputy, Bluefur joined in the chant. "Thistleclaw, Thistleclaw!" she yowled.

After the cheering ended, the she-cat turned and padded into the nursery, to be with her kits. Licking them each in turn, she curled herself around them, glad to be away from Thistleclaw and Goosefeather. She heard excited meowing outside, congratulations and cheerful conversation, as she fell asleep.

--

"Come with me, Bluefur."

A handsome tabby tom stared at her, his gaze soft. "Please," he pleaded. "I love you so much, and you'd be so much happier with me in RiverClan."

Bluefur guiltily found herself walking closer, looking right into the

tabby's eyes. "I love you too, Oakheart," she murmured. "But I can't. We're in different Clans."

"Would you rather stay in a Clan with a murderous cat for a Deputy, or with me? Hailstar would let you in if I convinced him. We could raise the kits together."

Bluefur ripped her gaze away from Oakheart's face. She looked at her paws, feeling bad that she saw the sense in his words. Very slowly, she turned back to the tom and touched her nose to his. Immediately he disappeared and Bluefur was alone.

"Bluefur?" A voice snarled.

Bluefur snapped her head around to look behind her and saw Thistleclaw. His claws were unsheathed and blood pooled around his paws. Suddenly she was not in the starry meadow she was standing in a few moments ago, but in a horrible pine forest which smelled of death. She looked around at her surroundings, noticing that there was blood on the grass and in the streams. It seemed to stretch forever and ever and... She shuddered.

"What are you doing here? Why are you training here too?" Thistleclaw hissed, and Bluefur shrank back at the flurry of questions. Then the tom's eyes filled with malice and scorn.

"Are you still trying to become ThunderClan's deputy?" He sneered rather gleefully. "You do know last night I took your place?"

Bluefur's panic of being in a new environment faded, to be replaced by cold rage. "Of course I did," she hissed. "Training here *too*? You mean you train in this deathly place?

Thistleclaw ignored the question, his tail lashing. "Who was that you were with before?" He asked innocently, grinning. "What a handsome tom. What's his name again?"

"Oakheart," Bluefur replied after a brief hesitation. "I've seen him at Gatherings."

Thistleclaw's ears flicked up in interest. "Why is he in your dreams? What's going on, Bluefur? Are you a traitor?"

Bluefur stifled a hiss as she noticed Thistleclaw seemed excited to be getting under her fur and realising one of her deep secrets: that her kits were not Thrushpelt's, but Oakheart's, a warrior from another Clan. If this secret got out, all respect for her would be destroyed, and she could end up like Mapleshade, a she-cat from many, many moons ago who was in love with a RiverClan warrior and got exiled.

"Are you a traitor?" Thistleclaw repeated very slowly.

"Thistleclaw!" A she-cat's meow interrupted the blue-grey and the fluffy grey cats' conversation. From the shadows, a fluffy tortoiseshell she-cat padded over to the warriors.

Bluefur took a step back as the she-cat examined her. "Who's this?" She purred, but Bluefur got the impression her meow was anything but warm or kind.

Thistleclaw scowled. "This is Bluefur, a warrior of ThunderClan. I don't know who summoned her here," he grumbled. "Bluefur, this is Mapleshade. I think you two are similar in quite a few ways-"

Thistleclaw stopped talking as Mapleshade's tail moved over his mouth. She grinned.

"Similar, ay? How so?" She asked, padding dangerously close to Bluefur. Terrified, Bluefur took a step back. She was the villain who slaughtered cats because she lost her kits! "I-I know about you," Bluefur stuttered, all confidence evaporating. "Y-y-y-you-"

"I was getting revenge for a horrible thing that happened to me? Yes! *Finally*, someone understands!" Mapleshade meowed. "Now, how are we similar?"

Thistleclaw answered for Bluefur, his eyes sparkling. "Bluefur is in love with Oakheart!"

For a second hatred and disgust flared in Mapleshade's amber eyes, but was quickly replaced by fake pity. "I'm so sorry. That happened to me too. I hope nothing bad happens to you, dear."

Bluefur's blue gaze hardened. *No one can know!* She thought

furiously. "It's just a rumour," she snapped. "I am not like you at all. I would not kill, ever! And my kits are not Oakheart's!"

Mapleshade's eyes narrowed and all warmth disappeared. "I also thought that, before I was exiled. The world is horrible to cats like you and me, Bluefur. The only cat there for you when everyone leaves you is yourself, and you do not want to be all by yourself," she snarled.

Bluefur crouched down, her fur bristling and tail bushing out. "I-I-"

Mapleshade smiled, beginning to fade. "Goodnight, sweetie."

Bluefur woke up with a start, terrified and panting. She looked down fondly at her kits. Mistykit looked up sleepily at her. "Are you okay, mama?"

Bluefur purred tiredly. "I'm fine, just a bad dream. Go back to sleep now, dear."

As Mistykit fell back to sleep, Bluefur stared at one of the den walls. As she stared, a thought wandered into her mind. At first a daunting and terrifying one, but she became more and more certain. She couldn't let her kits be in a Clan with a Deputy like Thistleclaw, who she guessed was training with Mapleshade. She closed her eyes.

She had to go to RiverClan.

Chapter Two

"Where are we going?"

Bluefur looked down at Mistykit. "We're going to go on a night adventure!" She purred. "Let's play a game called Escape the Camp."

"What do you do?" Stonekit mewled, head tipped to one side.

"We have to sneak out of the camp," Bluefur whispered. "We're in ShadowClan camp, and we gotta escape."

Mosskit puffed out her chest. "I can do that!"

Bluefur smiled warmly. "I'm sure you can, dear. Now, who wants to be carried first? Remember, we all have to be very quiet, because ShadowClan warriors might hear us!"

"Me!" Mistykit mewed, looking terrified at the idea of ShadowClan abducting her.

"Okay. We just have to make it to the RiverClan border, and we'll be safe."

Two nights after she decided what to do and a night before now, at the Gathering, Bluefur had met Oakheart and said she was going to RiverClan with the kits. He happily agreed and said he'd meet them at the border. Now Bluefur and the three kits trekked through the snow, taking turns to be carried by the scruff.

"Almost there, my little ones!" Bluefur encouraged as they neared the border. Mosskit was starting to fall behind so she carefully let Stonekit back down on the ground and picked up the white and grey she-kit. Mistykit scampered close to her brother and pressed against him.

Bluefur's ears pricked up as she heard a rustle in the bushes and saw a flash of brown.

"A ShadowClan warrior!" Mistykit squealed, closing her eyes tight.

Quickly Bluefur lay Mosskit down next to her siblings and watched as Oakheart leapt neatly along the stepping stones. He looked down at the three kits and at Bluefur, warmth and love in his eyes. "They're amazing, Bluefur. Thank you for coming. I'm so excited! You're going to learn how to swim, and to fish, and I'm going to be a father-"

"What's going on here?"

Bluefur spun around, her back fur bristling and her eyes wide. Thrushpelt padded quietly out of the bushes, his eyebrows furrowed. Mistykit ran over to him, purring. "Hi Papa!" she squealed.

Bluefur felt Oakheart stiffen beside her, and heard a growl rise in his throat. Thrushpelt dipped his head.

"Hello, Oakheart," he meowed, his voice calm and posture composed. "Good to see you again."

Oakheart shuffled his paws nervously, and Bluefur felt like a new apprentice being scolded by her mentor. Thrushpelt padded over to Bluefur. "I saw you leave with the kits. What's going on?" He asked.

Bluefur was surprised to see Thrushpelt had hardly any hostility in his eyes, only warmth and concern. She pressed closer to Oakheart. "We're leaving. Me and the kits. We're going to live in RiverClan, away from Thistleclaw. Please don't tell anyone."

Thrushpelt stepped away with wide eyes. "Why? Thistleclaw is fine!"

Bluefur snorted. "If you truly believe that, you're a mouse-brain. Have you seen his ambition? He will kill to get his way."

Thrushpelt shuffled his paws. "But he's our Deputy- you'll be betraying your Clan, and-"

"I'm leaving," Bluefur growled, her voice firm. "You cannot stop me."

Thrushpelt sighed. "Okay, I won't stop you. I'm scared about Thistleclaw too," she mumbled. His gaze hardened suddenly. "I'm coming with you."

Oakheart hissed. "What? Since when?"

Thrushpelt's eyes narrowed. "Since now. A-and, uh, if you don't let me in, I'll tell the Clan about you guys."

In the midst of this chaos, Bluefur couldn't help a twinge of amusement. Thrushpelt wasn't good at being threatening.

"I don't even know if Bluefur will be able to stay," Oakheart meowed steadily. "But I don't want you going off and telling ThunderClan. I'll let you come with us."

"Hurry up!" Bluefur snapped. "The kits are cold!"

"Right, of course," Thrushpelt mumbled. He shot a grateful glance at Oakheart, but he looked away. They each picked up a kit and padded off to the RiverClan camp. As they walked off, with a pang of dread, Bluefur realised Tigerclaw had been watching them.

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In the camp, cats began to wake up. A tom Bluefur recognised as Crookedjaw, the Deputy of RiverClan, stuck his head out of the Warrior's den. Cats began to murmur to each other, shooting hostile glances at the ThunderClan cats.

"Why have you come here?" A voice boomed. On what Bluefur guessed was some kind of highrock, Hailstar sat. His eyes glistened with distrust.

Bluefur inhaled deeply. "Thistleclaw is the new Deputy of ThunderClan, and-"

Crookedjaw snorted. "ThunderClan thinks they own the forest. You can wait until the gathering, you know! And why bring kits?" He sneered.

Hailstar flicked his tail for silence, and Crookedjaw looked at his

paws guiltily.

"We left ThunderClan," Bluefur mewed bluntly. "And we want to join RiverClan."

Hailstar looked at Oakheart and understanding flashed in the leader's eyes. "You know, if you do this, you'll have to tell everyone?" He murmured. "ThunderClan will realise."

Oakheart nodded. "I know. I can do it now if you want."

With a nod, Hailstar let Oakheart leap onto the highrock.

"RiverClan, I have something to say," the tabby announced. "I-I've been... seeing Bluefur. Mistykit, Stonekit and Mosskit are mine."

Bluefur's eyes widened as he hung his head in shame. Suddenly she felt a presence- a cat, winding herself around Bluefur. It was Mapleshade.

"This is exactly what happened to me. The tom was ashamed of my kits. I guess it runs in the family," she hissed. "I told you so."

Bluefur didn't say anything, ignoring the she-cat and staring at Oakheart. When he lifted his gaze, he looked... proud?

"But these are my kits, and I love Bluefur, so if she goes, I go too!" He yowled.

Silence.

Hailstar nodded for Oakheart to go back down. When he had, the Leader continued. "I will think about this. But, you have said what you wish, Oakheart. If she gets exiled, you will go with her."

"You can't!" Bluefur pleaded, surprised by the emotion in her voice. "Tigerclaw knows. Thistleclaw knows. I'll have nowhere to go, my kits will never survive in leaf-bare. I'll do anything!"

Hailstar's ear twitched, but he said nothing. "I said I will think about it," he said firmly. "It is not a definite no. You can take your kits and Thrushpelt to the nursery, and rest for now."

As Bluefur slowly walked into the nursery, she felt scared. Would she be exiled, just as Mapleshade had, with nowhere to go? Would she have to live as a loner? The kits followed her into the temporary den, and she curled up tightly and protectively around them, terrified of the future.

Chapter Three

"All cats old enough to swim, gather under the highrock to hear my words!"

Groggily, Bluefur got to her paws. Why would Sunstar say swim? She thought, confused. Then she remembered she was in RiverClan's camp, waiting for Hailstar to decide her destiny. Would she leave or stay at RiverClan? She checked the kits were still asleep, then padded out of the den.

"This morning, two ThunderClan warriors and three kits came into our camp, saying they wanted to join our Clan. I have thought it over with my senior warriors, and we have agreed on what to do."

Suddenly all eyes were on Bluefur, Thrushpelt and Oakheart. Bluefur squirmed, feeling like her name had been called out at the full moon gathering.

"Now, of course, you will be punished for breaking the code and leaving your Clan, but since you have kits we will let you stay until leaf-bare is over," Hailstar meowed.

"But what about after?" Bluefur exclaimed.

Hailstar's tail twitched. Bluefur hung her head, ashamed for speaking out in front of a Clan leader.

"Once it is newleaf, we will discuss this again," the Leader rumbled.

Bluefur nodded. "Thank you so much, Hailstar. We are all very grateful," she purred, nudging Thrushpelt, who nodded vigorously.

Oakheart also smiled warmly at Hailstar, who nodded and turned away. "That marks the end of this meeting. Crookedjaw, you organise the patrols for today," Hailstar meowed.

Crookedjaw looked more than annoyed that Hailstar let Bluefur into RiverClan, but didn't say anything, just reluctantly announcing who

would go on a hunting patrol. Satisfied, for now, Bluefur padded back into the nursery to check on her kits. At the entrance, her name was called out.

"Bluefur, you're going on the border patrol with me, Thrushpelt and Beetlenose," Crookedjaw called, eyes narrow.

Bluefur turned, dread crawling in her stomach. "Which border?" She asked slowly.

Crookedjaw started to pad out of camp, with Thrushpelt and Beetlenose following quickly. As he left, he turned back to look at her and notion with his head for her to follow.

"The ThunderClan border."

A dark tabby padded out of the bushes into a dip in the forest. He sat down, amber eyes gleaming. He waited for moments which seemed like moons, and finally, a fluffy grey tom walked over. "Tigerclaw, what did you want? It's the middle of the night. I almost stood on White-eye's tail!" The grey tom exclaimed. Then he stopped. Tigerclaw's eyes were excited, victorious even. "What is it?" The grey tom asked, intrigued.

"Well, Thistleclaw, I saw Bluefur and Thrushpelt at the RiverClan border- their kits were there too. Except, they're not Thrushpelt's," Tigerclaw hissed, a grin on his face. "They're Oakheart's!"

Thistleclaw's ear twitched. "Anything I don't already know?" he asked dryly. "I learned that a few days ago."

Tigerclaw's eyes narrowed. "And you didn't tell anyone? Now Bluefur's with precious Oakheart in RiverClan, that traitor!"

Now Thistleclaw actually looked surprised. "She's in *RiverClan*?!" He yowled. "Of course! Why didn't I realise?"

The grey tom's voice dropped to a snarl and he began to pace. "Now she's going to become Deputy of RiverClan, and she's going to get what she wants! That sly fox, thinking she could just leave!"

Tigerclaw took a step back, looking concerned for his friend. "Thistleclaw, it's okay, no-one will trust her there-"

"For now!" Thistleclaw spat. "What a fox heart, I'll rip her throat out, I'll-"

Tigerclaw snorted. "Like she'd let you do that," the dark tabby muttered, sinking his long hooked claws into the grass. "Let's sleep for now, and tomorrow we'll go patrol the RiverClan border. We can ask what happened. Okay?"

Thistleclaw relaxed. "I'm not a kit," he grumbled, unable to hide his look of relief. Tigerclaw dipped his head and walked off, with Thistleclaw following close behind.

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"Ah, Tigerclaw, Thistleclaw and Whitestorm. How are you three?"

Crookedjaw's meow sounded from up ahead as Bluefur caught up with the border patrol. Her eyes widened as she heard the names. Thistleclaw and his closest follower. Whitestorm was there too, and she couldn't bear to see his nephew's expression when he saw her. Had he seen Thrushpelt already? What did he think?

Thistleclaw dipped his head. "Crookedjaw, Beetlenose, and *Thrushpelt,"* He meowed, spitting out the last name. "We're doing fine, thank you. How are you?"

"We're good-" Thrushpelt began, but Thistleclaw cut him off.

"Didn't want to hear from a traitor, sorry," he snarled. Bluefur got to see Whitestorm's expression, and visibly flinched as she trotted over. He looked furious.

Bluefur's ears flattened as neither Crookedjaw or Beetlenose defended the new RiverClan warrior. Thrushpelt just hung his head. Quietly, Bluefur slowed her pace and walked over. Hoping no one would notice her, she sat down behind the patrol.

"What are you doing on the other side of the border, Thrushpelt?" Tigerclaw sneered. "Upset that Bluefur didn't become Deputy? I like

how the way you chose to deal with it is to join the fish eaters." The dark tabby's eyes shone innocently.

Whitestorm gasped suddenly. "Bluefur?!" He exclaimed, voice tight with fury. "What are you doing over there?"

Thistleclaw shrugged. "I told you she didn't truly care about you, Whitestorm. Only I do."

Bluefur snarled as Thistleclaw wrapped his tail around Whitestorm's body. "Whitestorm, do you not see what Thistleclaw would do as Leader? He'd mark the borders with blood, and StarClan knows what he'd do with my kits! It's love that's guiding me to do this, and Thistleclaw has none of that."

Thistleclaw looked genuinely wounded, but Bluefur could tell it wasn't true. She spat at him, her eyes narrowed in fury. She felt Thrushpelt's tail rested on her back and relaxed. "Let's just mark the border and leave," she muttered. Crookedjaw nodded in agreement and Beetlenose hissed a quick goodbye.

Bluefur followed the other three cats, her tail lashing and eyes narrowed. She turned her head back and glared at the ThunderClan cats with fiery eyes. *I will not let you take over RiverClan*, she thought furiously. Thistleclaw caught her eye and grinned. *I will show Hailstar I am a great asset to my Clan, become Leader and then I will make sure your ambition is never fulfilled. Good luck, Thistleclaw.*

As she walked on, she became more and more confident with every step. *I will stop you if it kills me.*

Chapter Four

Bluefur padded into camp with a plump mouse in her jaws. Her chest was puffed out in pride as she strode over to the fresh kill pile. Hailstar looked at her approvingly. It had been a few moons after she had 'joined' RiverClan, and she had tried her hardest to prove herself to her adoptive Clan. Leaf-bare was almost over, and the ice was beginning to thaw. Mistykit, Stonekit and Mosskit were almost apprentices and were growing bigger every day. Thrushpelt had won the trust of the Clan when he fought valiantly in a battle for sunning rocks, earning them the territory.

"Soon we'll have to teach you to fish," Crookedjaw meowed, nodding curtly to her and jerking her back into the present. "Thank you, Crookedjaw," the blue-grey she-cat purred. "Do you know where Brambleberry is? I think I got a thorn in my paw, and it's really deep!"

Crookedjaw motioned with his head to the nursery. "She's cleaning the nests. If you helped her, that'd be great. There's moss already in there to use."

Bluefur nodded and limped off to the nursery with her tail high and her eyes bright. A hopeful feeling in her chest began to form, and she began to think that maybe she'd be allowed in the Clan for good.

After she helped Brambleberry and got the thorn out of her pad, she walked back into the middle of the camp and sat down, watching her kits playing. "I'm a ThunderClan cat!" Stonekit hissed. "I'm gonna rip you to shreds!"

Mistykit snorted. "Yeah right, ThunderClan cat! I'm Mistystar and I'm the Leader of RiverClan! Mossclaw, let's fight!"

Mosskit shuffled her paws. "Do I have to be Mossclaw? It sounds

kind of mean... I'd rather be a medicine cat!"

"What about Mossleaf then?" Bluefur suggested with a smile. "And maybe you can be a medicine cat one day."

Mosskit brightened. "Okay! Mistystar can fight for me and I can heal her!" She purred.

Mistykit nodded in agreement. "And Stonestar doesn't have a medicine cat!"

Stonekit's eyes narrowed. "Why can't I be in RiverClan?" He grumbled.

"Well, maybe you can move from ThunderClan?" Mosskit suggested with shining eyes. "Apparently Mama and Uncle Thrushpelt and we did! Right, mama?"

Bluefur looked away. "RiverClan is our home now," is all she said.

Stonekit scampered closer to Mistykit and Mosskit, but before he could say anything he was interrupted.

"Sunningrocks! ThunderClan is trying to take sunningrocks!" Timberfur, a Warrior of RiverClan yowled.

Bluefur leapt to her paws and let her claws out of their sheaths. She raised her voice loud enough to sound above the clamour of cats hissing and yowling.

"Let's show those mouse-hearts their place! Sunningrocks is ours!" She yowled.

Some cats looked at her in surprise. She understood- she was a former ThunderClan cat, after all. But she was pleased to hear cats yelling agreement and nodding at her words. Hailstar raised his tail and the Clan went silent. He stared at Bluefur through thoughtful narrowed eyes.

"Okay," he meowed after a few moments. "Crookedjaw, you lead the patrol with Bluefur, Thrushpelt, Oakheart, Petaldust and Timberfur. Go, and quick!"

Crookedjaw nodded, gathering the warriors together and then racing out of camp. Bluefur sprinted after him, able to easily leap over the stepping stones now. Timberfur was right. There were ThunderClan warriors just taking the rocks. Thistleclaw, Adderfang, Tigerclaw, Dappletail and Swiftbreeze were marking around sunningrocks!

"RiverClan, attack!" Crookedjaw yowled, leaping at the warrior closest to him. Adderfang was knocked to the ground and the two toms tussled in the grass. Bluefur joined in, jumping at Tigerclaw and biting down onto his shoulder. He let out a hiss of pain and shook her off his back, leaving her dazed for a second. He pinned her down and snarled in her face. She was surprised to smell how different ThunderClan scent was now. Bluefur struggled under his strong grip and snarled in pain as he slashed at her cheek. Resorting to last moves, she lay limp, looking like she had given up.

"Can't fight me, huh? Weakling!" Tigerclaw laughed, his grip loosening. Bluefur took this opportunity to kick him off when he was distracted, leaping to her paws neatly and snarling at him. Nearby, Thrushpelt and Thistleclaw slashed and bit at each other and Bluefur decided she needed to help her friend. She used her small frame and lithe build to her advantage and slid under Tigerclaw, ending up on the other side of him and biting down on his tail. He let out a yelp and tried to turn around but Bluefur started to nip at his hind legs. After a bit of that, he snarled and turned to fight someone else. Feeling proud of herself, Bluefur looked back to Thrushpelt and Thistleclaw. Thistleclaw had pinned Thrushpelt down and- was he about to do a killing blow?!

Outraged, Bluefur tackled Thistleclaw, bringing him off of Thrushpelt. She spat in his face as the two rolled on the ground. For a few seconds, Thistleclaw was caught off guard, but even when he had realised what was happening, he did nothing and only let Bluefur pin him to the ground and push his face into the grass. But then suddenly, she felt another presence, one she knew but also was very unfamiliar. Then, after a second she realised and hastily got off Thistleclaw. Mapleshade was here.

She shook her head. Mapleshade was dead. She couldn't hurt her. Bluefur noticed Thistleclaw got back up to his paws and raised a

paw, slicing his muzzle and then biting his ear when he was confused. With a yelp, he pulled away and turned to the rest of the battle. "ThunderClan, retreat!" He yowled, very reluctantly, running into the bushes. The other cats of the ThunderClan patrol ran off after him and RiverClan was left alone with sunningrocks belonging to them. Bluefur raised her head to the sky and let out a yowl of joy. They had won!

On the way back to camp, Bluefur's pride gave way to shame and nervousness. She had been fearless fighting ThunderClan, but was that necessarily a good thing? Would she soon not care at all about her birth Clan? Trying to shrug the thought off, she joined the rest of RiverClan for a feast. She didn't need to care right now. They had won.

Chapter Five

"I have been told by Crookedjaw that you both fought well, Thrushpelt and Bluefur."

Bluefur watched Hailstar intently with ears pricked. Her eyes shone. Was this when she and her kits would finally be let into the Clan?

"As you both know, leaf-bare is over and prey is beginning to run again. The agreement was that we'd discuss your place in the Clan when the snow began to thaw, and it has. I have been talking with Crookedjaw and we have decided that..."

With an almost mischevious glint in his eyes, he hesitated. After a few moments, he dipped his head.

"You two are a great asset to RiverClan, and the warrior code says to help any kit in need. You may stay in RiverClan for as long as you wish!"

"Bluefur, Thrushpelt!" The Clan chanted. Once everyone had quietened down, Hailstar began to speak again.

"We also have three new apprentices," he continued with a smile. "Mosskit, Mistykit and Stonekit, step forwards."

With a gasp, Bluefur rushed over to her three kits, giving them licks and smoothing their fur. "You're not ready at all!" She sighed. Then she saw the excitement in their eyes and stepped back. "Good luck," she purred.

The three kits scampered forwards. Mosskit looked nervous, Mistykit looked like she was going to leap up into the air, and Stonekit tried putting on a serious expression. With a warm smile, Bluefur watched the ceremony.

"Stonekit, Mistykit and Mosskit, you have reached the age of six moons and will now take the names of apprentices," Hailstar

started, looking at the three kits with pride in his blue eyes.

"Mistykit, until you become a Warrior, you will be known as Mistypaw. Your mentor will be Timberfur. I trust he will pass on all that he knows to you."

Timberfur padded over to Mistypaw and touched noses with her, giving her a smile. "You'll be the best apprentice ever known with me as your mentor."

"Stonekit, you will be known as Stonepaw. Your mentor will be Crookedjaw. You're a brave warrior and a loyal Deputy and I trust you to teach Stonepaw your skills."

Stone touched noses with Crookedjaw, absolutely no hesitation in his movement. Crookedjaw grinned at her. "I sure will, Hailstar."

"Lastly, Mosskit, you will be known as-"

"Um, Hailstar?"

Bluefur bristled in surprise as Mosskit interrupted the leader. She opened her mouth to scold her kit, but Mosskit carried on before she could say a word.

"I'd like to be Brambleberry's apprentice," she mumbled, shuffling her paws. "If that's okay."

Hailstar nodded approvingly. "Of course, then. Mosskit, you will be known as Mosspaw. You will be Brambleberry's apprentice, and you will train to become a medicine cat."

Mosspaw touched noses with the medicine cat and sat down next to her. Bluefur purred, racing over to her kits as the ceremony ended. "I'm so proud of you all! And you all have such amazing mentors, they're going to teach you so much! Tell me all about your first outing, okay?"

Stonepaw shied away from Bluestar's nuzzle. "Mama, I'm an apprentice now!" He whined, batting at her with his paws. "And I'm going to become the best Warrior ever!"

"No, I will!" Mistypaw retorted, tackling her brother.

Next to the two tussling littermates, Mosspaw smiled shyly at Bluefur. "I'm so excited to be a medicine cat!" She purred.

Bluefur grinned. "You're going to be great," she encouraged. "I know it!"

As Mosspaw padded away with her tail high, Bluefur saw Oakheart sit next to her. He smiled sweetly at her. "It's so amazing that *our* kits are apprentices," he meowed, shooting a glance at Thrushpelt at the word *our*. Bluefur rested her tail on Oakheart's shoulder. "The kits know you're their father," she soothed. "They call Thrushpelt Uncle Thrushpelt, remember? They wouldn't do that if they thought he's their father."

Oakheart shrugged. "I guess," he mumbled. "Something about him just rubs me the wrong way. He's so... nice. Is he plotting something?"

Bluefur laughed. "No, Oakheart. Thrushpelt's just genuinely nice. Unlike you, talking about cats behind their backs," she purred, looking at him mischievously.

Oakheart purred, pretending to give Bluefur a cuff over the ears. She ducked and pushed him lightly on the chest, eyes shining. "I love you," she murmured, drawing in close.

"Love you too," Oakheart purred. "I'm so glad you're here in RiverClan with me."

Bluefur drew back, eyes glittering with worry. "What about Thistleclaw? I'm really worried about what will happen when..."

"He won't. And if he does, we won't let him take over RiverClan, okay?" Oakheart reassured with a smile.

Bluefur nodded silently. Then she looked up to the sky. "I'm going to have a nap," she decided, giving Oakheart another smile and then walking off to the Warriors' den. She curled up in her nest and soon enough fell asleep.

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Bluefur was dreaming. She stood in front of Hailstar, awaiting his judgement. Oakheart hung his head in shame. She had seen this all before. Soon he would say he wanted her in RiverClan, right? But Oakheart said nothing. Hailstar narrowed his eyes at Bluefur. "Leave," he growled. "We have no place for traitors. Become a loner or something."

"And my kits?" Bluefur whimpered.

"They will go with you. We don't want half-clan kits in our camp," Hailstar snarled. "Now go, and don't return!"

"What about me?" Thrushpelt asked, eyes narrowed.

Hailstar thought for a second, then flicked his tail. "You may stay."

Outraged and horrified, Bluefur ran out of camp with her kits following. They arrived at the river. It was rushing, and suddenly it was not frozen over, but flooded. "We'll have to swim," she murmured, realising that the stepping stones had disappeared under the waves.

She carried Mistykit in her jaws first, swimming over. But before she could make it, a wave splashed over her head and she was swept under. She heard two tiny splashes after her and realised her kits had jumped in to save her.

Bluefur closed her eyes and swam up. The kits were dead now, and she had nothing. Now all she needed to do was make the Clans pay for what they did to her.

"This is how I feel," a voice whispered in Bluefur's ear. "You wouldn't dare to even have a little sympathy?"

Suddenly, Bluefur woke up, still tasting the stream water in her mouth and hearing Mapleshade's voice echo in her ears.

Chapter Six

"Mistyfoot! Stonefur! Mistyfoot! Stonefur!"

It had been two seasons since Mistyfoot and Stonefur became apprentices, and now Bluefur was training an apprentice of her own, Whitepaw. Now her daughter and son were warriors, and Bluefur couldn't be more proud.

Mosspaw ran over to the two new warriors as their names were cheered, nuzzling them. "I'm so proud of you two!"

"You'll get your name soon, I'm sure," Stonefur purred. "You're such a great medicine cat!"

Mosspaw snorted, her tail tip twitching. "By soon, do you mean when I'm an elder? It's been forever!" The apprentice whined.

Bluefur rested her tail on the medicine cat's shoulder. "You'll get your name quicker if you're patient!" She joked. Then she turned to her son and daughter, emotion glistening in her eyes. "I'm so proud of both of you. You're Warriors!"

Mistyfoot dipped her head, trying to hide her smile. "Thanks, mum. You've been so supportive while we've been apprentices."

Stonefur nodded in agreement. "I'm so happy that we've had someone like you around while we grew up. You and Oakheart."

Suddenly Stonefur got bowled over by a flash of brown. Bluefur leapt back in surprise, letting out a yelp. Oakheart had Stonefur pinned down and was purring over him. "Still can't beat your father, 'ay?" He teased, getting off.

Stonefur snorted. "I wasn't expecting it! I was talking!" He exclaimed, but despite his words, amusement glimmered in his blue eyes.

"A great warrior is always expecting... uh... things." Oakheart

hesitated, confused on what to say.

"A great warrior always expects the worst, you mean?" Bluefur purred, nudging him with a paw. "I didn't think you were so old you'd forget such a sentence! I can see the grey flecks now."

Oakheart scoffed. "I knew that! I just forgot. And if I'm old, you're old too!"

Bluefur snickered. "Yeah right!"

With narrowed eyes, Crookedjaw padded over to them. "If you're done?" he muttered pointedly.

Bluefur licked her chest fur self-consciously. "Yes, Crookedjaw?"

Crookedjaw flicked his tail side to side in irritation. "You, Whitepaw, Stonefur, Thrushpelt and I are going to sunningrocks. We caught Thunderclan scent inside our borders."

Bluefur scowled. "Okay, Crookedjaw. We won't let ThunderClan disrespect our border!"

Crookedjaw's eyes narrowed and he gave a curt nod. "Let's get going, then. Go get Whitepaw."

Bluefur dashed off into the apprentices' den, calling inside for the black tom. "Whitepaw, come on, we're going on a patrol to sunningrocks," she meowed.

Whitepaw jumped to his paws and ran over with shining eyes. "Really?" He purred.

Bluefur nodded with a smile. "C'mon, Crookedjaw is waiting for us."

Whitepaw raced outside and Bluefur followed at a trot. She smiled at the tom's enthusiasm and his eagerness to learn. Crookedjaw headed out and Bluefur, Mistyfoot, Stonefur and Whitepaw followed.

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At sunningrocks, Bluefur saw Thistleclaw, Tigerclaw and Whitestorm talking. They chatted in low voices, excitement in their eyes and their tones. Bluefur's back fur bristled in hostility. Crookedjaw lowered his tail, the motion meaning for the RiverClan cats to be silent and tune in.

"And then the old mange pelt will be gone," Thistleclaw was meowing, with his chest puffed out and eyes gleaming. Tigerclaw nodded.

"But doesn't he still have lives left?" Whitestorm asked, tipping his head to one side thoughtfully. Bluefur felt sick. Whatever these cats were talking about, it didn't sound good, and it unnerved Bluefur to notice Whitestorm taking part.

The RiverClan cats spread out, hiding in bushes and behind trees. *But it doesn't really matter*, Bluefur reflected, *since they seem to be so into their conversation*.

Her ears flattened against her head as Thistleclaw's flicked up. A snarl rose in his throat and he curled his lip to reveal sharp teeth. "I smell RiverClan."

Whitestorm's brilliant amber eyes narrowed. "Fresh, as well," he agreed.

Crookedjaw flicked his tail and suddenly the hollow was alive with yowling and screeching. Bluefur raced for Thistleclaw, attempting to bowl him over and pin him down, but the Deputy swiftly moved out the way with a smile, catching her ear and giving it a hard blow that sent her reeling.

Thistleclaw took Bluefur's distraction to run up to Stonefur, who was grappling with Tigerclaw. Once Bluefur regained her strength, she realised Stonefur couldn't survive with two large toms such as Tigerclaw and Thistleclaw attacking him. She raced up to the hissing toms and batted Thistleclaw on the head. It wasn't meant to hurt, just to distract him. And it did. He turned and spat at Bluefur. "Weak RiverClan traitor!" He snarled, letting go of Stonefur and running at Bluefur. But he went right past Bluefur, and she felt the wind against her face as he sprinted away. Bluefur let out a screech

of warning.

But she didn't get to see what happened, being attacked by a flash of white. She was suddenly pinned to the ground by Whitestorm, who was snarling in her face. She had never seen him mad before, he was usually so calm and composed. She couldn't believe she was fighting her nephew, the cat she raised from a kit when Thistleclaw was unfit to be a father.

"Traitor," Whitestorm growled, sinking his claws deep into Bluefur's shoulders. The queen let out a hiss of pain, trying feebly to get Whitestorm off. With a sinking feeling, she realised what was happening.

Whitestorm was going to kill her.

With nothing to do, Bluefur just tried to kick at Whitestorm's belly. Slowly he leaned down to give the killing bite and Bluefur shut her eyes.

But the pain never arrived. Bluefur opened an eye and saw Whitestorm had gotten off of her. She got to her paws, satisfied, then turned and saw him.

Thistleclaw was standing over the warrior, blood coating his paws and muzzle. The warrior's tongue was hanging out. His eyes were dull and lifeless, and he lay limp. The clearing was silent. No-one moved. They all just stared at his corpse and Thistleclaw. He looked down, not saying a word. There was no regret in his expression. Then he raised his head to the sky and let out a yowl of victory.

The cat who loved Bluefur, the cat who left his Clan to be with her, one of the bravest warriors in the forest and definitely the kindest one, was on his way to StarClan.

Thrushpelt was dead.

Chapter Seven

Bluefur trekked back to camp, her eyes dull. She was barely aware of what was happening anymore. She raised her muzzle to the sky and unsheathed her claws. *Why would you let this happen, StarClan?*

She realised the camp was nearby. She just wanted to get to her nest as soon as possible. She wanted to curl up and sleep. At least when she slept nothing in her dreams was real.

Thrushpelt was dead, and it was her fault.

Why did I let him join me in RiverClan? She asked herself. *Why did I distract Thistleclaw?*

Stonefur walked up next to her and let her lean on his shoulder. She just let her paws carry her to the camp. "He's dead," she whispered. "It's my fault."

Stonefur gave her a lick between the ears. "It isn't your fault, mum. It's Thistleclaw's, and ThunderClan's."

Bluefur was hardly listening. He's dead, she repeated in her head.

Hailstar smiled when the group of cats padded into camp, then frowned, sensing something wrong. He jumped down from the highrock and padded over to Bluefur and Stonefur. "Bluefur, what happened?" He murmured with sympathetic eyes.

Bluefur couldn't reply. She just stared at the Leader, hardly hearing what the black tom said. Then Whitepaw, Crookedjaw and Mistyfoot trodded into camp with the corpse of Thrushpelt. Bluefur snapped her gaze away from the dead tom, a fresh wave of grief almost sweeping her off her paws. She stumbled. Hailstar gasped and cats from the Clan ran towards Thrushpelt's body, mourning and yowling in grief and surprise. Bluefur ignored it- or couldn't hear because of her grief. She walked into the Warrior's den, staggering and flopping into her nest. She closed her eyes and let

out a sob, curling up and letting sleep wash over her.

"Bluestar! Bluestar!"

Bluefur - now Bluestar, stood in the clearing of cats cheering. So many cats she knew! All grief for Thrushpelt had swept away as she stood. Moonflower, Snowfur and... was that Mosspaw? Why was she here? She saw Mosspaw fine just earlier! Panic began to make her fur stand on end.

"You are ThunderClan's new Leader," Sunstar purred with a dip of his head.

Bluestar stepped back. ThunderClan's? She lived in RiverClan! Thistleclaw would be the one becoming Leader if Sunstar died. She opened her mouth to speak but found herself unable to. She turned and saw Featherwhisker staring at her kindly, and began to feel like there were walls closing in on her, and she couldn't breathe, and-

"This is a dream," a voice murmured.

Bluestar turned around to see Snowfur again and realised no, she wasn't the leader of ThunderClan, she was just Bluefur.

Snowfur sat down. All the cats froze. "This is what could have been. Another timeline, if you will. You gave up your kits to RiverClan and became Leader of ThunderClan."

Bluefur turned back and sighed glumly at the cats. "Why is Mosspaw there?"

Snowfur's eyes glittered with sadness. "Mosskit died when you brought your kits through the snow to Oakheart in this universe," she mewed. Then she shook her fur out. "You can still do this, Bluefur. You can fulfil your ambition and become a leader. You can stop Thistleclaw's plans."

Bluefur found herself believing her sister until another cat appeared next to her with a hostile yet loving gaze fixed on Bluefur. "Moonflower!" Bluefur choked out.

Moonflower's eyes narrowed. She studied Bluefur for a second

before her amber gaze softened. "Your life has been so difficult, Bluefur. And it will not stop for a second. But I believe you can get through the hardships and become a leader RiverClan would be proud of."

"Are you saying that StarClan has destined me to beat-"

Bluefur was cut off by a muzzle pressing against her cheek. She felt the fresh and familiar grief as she turned and found herself staring into Thrushpelt's kind eyes. The tom took a step back.

"I'm so sorry I had to leave you, Bluefur. But don't let it destroy you, please. That would hurt me so much more," he whispered.

"You were the best friend I ever had," Bluefur sighed, closing her eyes.

Thrushpelt smiled. Suddenly, he let out a gasp and stared at Bluefur with a gaze that was rather terrifying. Bluefur shrunk back, eyes wide.

"The plants of evil will sink into the Clans and destroy them all. Only the colour of the deep sea will be able to save the four Clans from destruction."

Bluefur was suddenly drowning, being held down by someone she couldn't recognise. She struggled to breathe, flailing her paws underwater, and found herself lying limp and closing her eyes. Giving up, she let the darkness wash over her as the water suffocated her.

Bluefur snapped awake, all pride and happiness of seeing her kin gone, as she realised it was a dream. *All three of them are dead.*

But it felt *so much more* than a dream. It felt so... real. Bluefur furrowed her eyebrows and sank down back into her nest. The Clan was mourning Thrushpelt, she guessed. But she didn't want to join in. She couldn't.

After a few moments, the sadness was replaced by cold, hard fury. Thistleclaw had killed Thrushpelt, and she would do *anything* to make him pay. She stalked out of the den and into the camp,

deciding she would tell Brambleberry and Mosspaw about her dream. It was now dawn, and Bluefur realised she had slept through the afternoon and the night. Just as she began to make her way to the Medicine Den, the two medicine cats padded into camp. Bluefur turned to Mosspaw and saw her own sadness and grief reflected in her daughter's eyes.

"Mosspaw," was all she could manage to say, looking down at her paws. "I have something to tell you both."

Mosspaw shook out her fur, her usual brightness appearing in her eyes. *How does she deal with death like that?* Bluefur thought with a sigh. "I'm Mossdapple now," the medicine cat purred. Bluefur opened her mouth, but nothing came out. She didn't say anything, just staring at her daughter with pride in her eyes.

"I had a dream last night," the warrior murmured. "It seemed so real. I was wondering if it was a sign from StarClan?"

Brambleberry nodded firmly, trotting off into her den. "Come with me."

Chapter Eight

"And then Thrushpelt said something. It was kind of scary, but it sounded like a prophecy or something," Bluefur finished.

She was sitting in the medicine den now, with Mossdapple and Brambleberry, explaining what had happened the night or afternoon before in her dreams.

Brambleberry leaned in. "What did he say?"

Bluefur was worried she wouldn't remember, but when she opened her jaws she found the words slipping out effortlessly. "The plants of evil will sink into the Clans and destroy them all. Only the colour of the deep sea will be able to save the four Clans from destruction," she meowed, talking as if the voice belonged to another different cat.

Brambleberry turned her head to Mossdapple, who's fluffy fur was puffed out to twice its size. She looked astonished and excited. "I got that last night at the moonpool! The exact same prophecy!"

The main medicine cat shook her head. "No. Not a prophecy, but a warning. Something bad is coming," she murmured. Then the white and black she-cat turned to Bluefur. "And my guess is it has something to do with you. Why else would you get the message?"

Bluefur shuffled her paws anxiously. "Then I found myself in some water, and I think I was drowning. It was really scary."

Mossdapple flicked her tail. "Leave us to think about it, Bluefur," she meowed, with a sympathetic gaze. "Maybe you could go train Whitepaw a bit? We promise we'll discuss it."

Bluefur sighed. "Okay. Bye, then," she mumbled, feeling clumsy and still sad and yet full of rage targeted at Thistleclaw. It wasn't her fault Thrushpelt was dead, it was Thistleclaw's and Tigerclaw's. She

would kill them both if she had to. They and ThunderClan were a bunch of fox-hearts. She dug her claws into the grass as she stalked out of camp, signalling with her tail for Whitepaw to follow. "We're going hunting," she hissed.

She didn't care if Whitepaw followed her or not. She had to work out a plan. How would she kill them? Or maybe she wouldn't. Maybe she'd just make their lives hell like they made her's. She was so deep in thought, she didn't notice Whitepaw asking her a question.

"Yes, Whitepaw?" she grunted.

"Are we going hunting or not? Because you seem to be walking to the ThunderClan border."

Bluefur nodded. "Right, of course. Sorry. I thought we could hunt by the river next to sunningrocks?"

Whitepaw nodded. "Good idea. I'll follow you. Do you remember how to swim?" The apprentice asked, his whiskers twitching.

Bluefur didn't say anything, just padded into the river, letting it soak her fur. It felt so relaxing, so she decided to just stay there for a few moments, purring contentedly. Then she dived under and grabbed a fish in her jaws, bringing her head back up and throwing it on the grass. She slowly walked out of the water, the liquid plastering her fur to her body. Whitepaw smiled. "Good catch!" He purred.

"You try over there," Bluefur meowed, less hostile. "I might've scared the fish away from around this area."

Whitepaw nodded, trotting off into the undergrowth and to a different part of the river. A few moments passed, then the warrior heard a screech of surprise, making her fur bristle. *If it's Thistleclaw, I swear to StarClan I'll kill him.* She ran over to where Whitepaw went, gasping as she saw him flailing in the water. "Whitepaw!" She screeched, jumping in after him. "I'll save you!"

She paddled as hard as she could, going underwater after her

apprentice. She grabbed him by the scruff and began to swim upwards. "We're almost there!" She yowled. "Keep your head up!"

Whitepaw was beginning to fall unconscious. "Snap out of it!" Bluefur yelled desperately. "Please!"

She sighed in relief and exhaustion as she reached the bank. She stared at Whitepaw. He wasn't breathing. Her breath caught in her throat. He couldn't be dead too!

Then she realised a trick medicine cats used to start up a cat's breathing if they had swallowed too much water. She made sure her paws were on the apprentice's chest and began to push and push and push. Suddenly Whitepaw began to cough up water and splutter. He looked up tiredly at his mentor. "Thanks, Bluefur," he murmured, looking half asleep and dazed.

Bluefur carried Whitepaw on her back and shoulders back to camp. It was extremely slow and pretty painful but she managed to do it. As she lay him down gently in camp, cats gathered around him. A few glared at her, muttering accusing words that hurt Bluefur.

"He's still alive," she hissed at the cats accusing her of murder. She would never kill.

At least, if it weren't Thistleclaw or Tigerclaw.

"He fell in the river," she explained, her tail lashing. "I saved him and got the water out of his chest. He's going to be fine."

Mossdapple looked up at her approvingly. "Bluefur's right. We just have to get him to the medicine den and he'll be fine."

Some warriors helped Mossdapple with carrying Whitepaw away. Bluefur watched with no expression in her blue eyes. Then she noticed Hailstar had sat down next to her.

"You did a brave thing," the leader meowed. "When Whitepaw is better, he'll have his Warrior ceremony. You know..." he looked at Bluefur, a curious and knowing glint in his eye. Did he know about the prophecy? "ThunderClan is very unlucky to have missed out on a warrior like you. I suspected you'd become deputy instead of

Thistleclaw, even. I'm impressed you took such a leap with joining RiverClan and starting over from scratch to become a respected warrior."

Bluefur dipped her head, genuinely honoured. "Thank you very much, Hailstar."

"But," Hailstar grunted, causing Bluefur to cringe. "I am worried about you. Ever since..." He didn't dare finish his sentence. "You've seemed more hostile. I know you're grieving, but with ThunderClan being so greedy with wanting sunningrocks, we need every warrior focused."

"It's all Thistleclaw's fault," Bluestar snarled, staring at him with cold eyes. "He killed Thrushpelt. I want him to pay."

Was that a nervous spark in Hailstar's eye? He stared at her with furrowed eyebrows, then turned and padded away.

Later on, Bluefur lay in her nest snuggling with Oakheart. She breathed in his sweet scent and closed her eyes.

No matter how unnerving it may seem, the truth is, Thistleclaw will pay, Bluefur snarled in her head, her fur beginning to bristle. *And I will make sure of it.*

Chapter Nine

Bluefur stalked along the sunningrocks border, her eyes glittering with malice. She looked around to make sure no-one was around, then stalked into ThunderClan territory. She sniffed the air, then continued through the familiar undergrowth. She realised how at home she felt in ThunderClan's territory, and how different it was than the territory of the Clan she lived in now. Then her eyes narrowed. Did she scent Snowfur? No. She was imagining things. With a shake of her head, she continued.

But as she walked, the scent of her dead sister grew stronger, and Bluefur couldn't take it anymore. She began to back away. The smell was everywhere and she was beginning to panic. Suddenly she felt like the forest was so small, and the trees were going to fall on top of her. She turned and ran off, ears flat against her head and ran back to sunningrocks. But the scent wouldn't go away. As she leapt out of the trees and onto the rocks, she saw the familiar white pelt of Snowfur, except it was transparent and stars floated around her. "Stop," her sister murmured, sadness in her eyes.

"Why? He killed Thrushpelt! He deserves to pay," Bluefur snarled. "Are you on his side? You were his mate, weren't you?!"

Snowfur shook her head. "I am not on his side. But if you kill Thistleclaw, aren't you just as bad as he is?"

Bluefur blinked in disbelief, gaping in rage. "What?! I am avenging Thrushpelt, he killed in cold blood!"

Snowfur's eyes narrowed. "Thrushpelt is going to stay dead," she meowed pointedly. "Even if you kill Thistleclaw. You would both be murderers."

Bluefur snarled. "I can't believe you, Snowfur! Thistleclaw deserves to die for what he did. He's evil!"

Snowfur's tail began to twitch. "Please, Bluefur. Don't stoop as low

as him."

Bluefur gasped as Snowfur began to fade. The white she-cat closed her eyes and disappeared. "Don't leave!" the blue-grey she-cat yowled, sitting down and hunching her shoulders. She lay down on the rocks, burying her muzzle in her paws. She lay there with the sun warming her fur, falling asleep.

Bluefur woke up to a prod in her side. She opened her eyes and saw an apprentice standing over her, looking apologetic. "Um, hi... Are you okay?" The apprentice asked, her amber eyes concerned.

Bluefur leapt to her paws. "What are you doing on RiverClan territory?" She snarled.

The apprentice jumped back. "I'm sorry! I was just trying to collect herbs," she murmured, looking down at her paws.

Bluefur softened. "Are you a medicine cat? What's your name?"

The apprentice seemed to realise Bluefur wasn't a threat to her and smiled. "Yeah, uh... I'm Spottedpaw. I'm the medicine apprentice of ThunderClan." Her eyes narrowed. "You're that ThunderClan warrior who left, right? Blue...pelt?"

Bluefur scowled. "Bluefur," she hissed. "Aren't there herbs anywhere else in ThunderClan territory?" She asked.

Spottedpaw's eyes widened. Then reluctantly she nodded. "Yeah. Sorry. I'll go now."

Bluefur watched with narrowed eyes as Spottedpaw turned and left. Then, a few moments later, Tigerclaw sprang out of the bushes with claws unsheathed, with a few cats following. "Traitor!" He screeched.

Bluefur was tackled by the large tabby tom, her head being pushed into the ground. "I'll kill you! You and your fox-hearted friend killed Thrushpelt!"

Tigerclaw leaned in close to her, grinning. "And you'll be next. Ready to go to StarClan, traitor? Or maybe you'll go to the Dark

forest," he spat.

Bluefur heard a yowl of surprise and Tigerclaw was pushed off of her. Standing in front of him was Crookedjaw, who was snarling.

"How dare you!" The deputy yowled. "Bluefur is no traitor. If anyone is a traitor, it'd be you and Thistleclaw."

Tigerclaw snorted in laughter. "You're far too stupid to be a deputy, Crookedjaw," he purred. "How about we fix that?"

Suddenly the tabby tom leapt at the Deputy and pinned him down. Crookedjaw pushed him off and the two tussled in the grass for a few moments before Tigerclaw pinned Crookedjaw down again but stronger. Very slowly he bit down very, very hard into Crookedjaw's throat. Crookedjaw tried to scream but blood had already started bubbling from his throat and out of his mouth. He let out a spasm, and Tigerclaw stepped away, leaving Crookedjaw to bleed out. He lifted his head and looked at Bluefur. "Sunningrocks is ours. If you say otherwise, you will end up like Crookedjaw. Got me?" He purred.

Bluefur didn't reply, racing over to Crookedjaw and nosing him to get up. But she knew he wouldn't. Now, in the same spot Thrushpelt died, Crookedjaw, the Deputy, had died too.

Bluefur collapsed in camp with Crookedjaw. She had dragged him back to camp best she could, but it had been horrible, and she had smelt the scent of death the whole way back.

Now Oakheart was sobbing over his brother's body, and the Clan was horrified. "Our Deputy is dead too?!" Timberfur exclaimed. Hailstar looked just as terrified for a second, then shook his fur and regained his posture.

"We will now sit vigil for Crookedjaw. Bluefur says he died a Warrior's death," he announced, his eyes sad. "Tonight I will announce the new deputy."

Then the Leader flicked his tail. "Bluefur, go to the Medicine den and then come with me. We need to have a talk," he growled.

Bluefur could hardly reply. Was this her fault? Neither Crookedjaw or Thrushpelt would've died if she didn't leave ThunderClan. Maybe it would've been better if she gave up her kits and became leader of ThunderClan.

The Warrior felt sick. She nuzzled Crookedjaw's cheek. He didn't die a Warrior's death. He died unfairly, by a horrible, evil tom. She closed her eyes and thought about the world where she became ThunderClan's leader. She lived in peace with Crookedstar as RiverClan's leader, and her Clan was fair and kind. It seemed perfect.

But Tigerclaw was the same. He would nearly kill her and drive her to madness and depression. She became a shell of her former self, and an unfamiliar tom would have to take over the clan for her.

She shook her head and got to her paws. She didn't need to worry about another world that would never happen now. Sighing, she walked off and headed for her daughter and Brambleberry in the medicine den.

Chapter Ten

"Oh, Bluefur, I'm so sorry."

Brambleberry stared sympathetically at the warrior as Mossdapple tended to her wounds. The main medicine cat smiled at her apprentice.

"You're doing well, Mossdapple," she purred. Then she turned to Bluefur, her eyes turning serious. "I truly believe that StarClan has a special path set out for you. Maybe these are just stepping stones of your great destiny?"

Bluefur stood up, staring at Brambleberry with disbelief in her eyes. "Just a stepping stone?!" She hissed. "Cats *died*! I thought you would care! You're a medicine cat!"

Brambleberry flicked her tail. "I do. But I really think that you will overcome your grief and become a cat the Clan can be proud of."

Bluefur snorted and stalked away from the medicine cats. "I need to go talk to Hailstar. He wants me in his den."

Bluefur strode out of the medicine den with her tail lashing, leaving Brambleberry and Mossdapple staring at each other nervously.

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"Ah, Bluefur. Are you alright?"

Hailstar stared at her with concerned amber eyes. His grey tail swished on the rock of the den and his ears were pricked.

Bluefur dipped her head and sat down in front of the tom as he lay down in his nest. "Fine, thank you. Are you?"

Hailstar nodded, sitting up. "Just thinking about who should be deputy," he meowed, beginning to groom himself. He opened one

eye, staring at her. "And about the prophecy."

Bluefur's ears flicked up. "You know about the prophecy?" She asked.

Hailstar smiled. "Of course I do. Medicine cats tell their leader if there is something to be reported, like a prophecy or a warning."

Bluefur licked her chest fur, embarrassed. "Right, of course."

Hailstar turned back to a wall of the den. He sighed. "What do you think it's about?" He asked.

"You don't have any idea?" Bluefur asked, surprised. She stood up, bristling a bit.

Hailstar blinked. "No. Do you?"

Bluefur sat back down, looking at her paws. "No, I just thought..."

Hailstar chuckled, to Bluefur's surprise. "Of course. Leaders know everything. If you're ever a leader, you'll know how much you don't know!"

Bluefur smiled. The way he talked sounded like he was considering her for deputy! Maybe she still had a chance to stop Thistleclaw. Bluefur lifted her head and met his eyes warmly.

"If I know anything about the prophecy, or have any theories, I'll let you know, okay?" the blue-grey she-cat meowed, turning to head out of the den.

Hailstar nodded. "See you later, Bluefur."

--

Bluefur padded out into the clearing and began to groom herself. She looked up in the middle of her grooming and saw Oakheart padding towards her with dull eyes. Bluefur sighed, nuzzling her mate as he approached. "I'm so sorry," she murmured, licking him on the cheek. The two lay down together, twining tails and grooming each other. Bluefur felt rage burning inside her once

more. Tigerclaw and Thistleclaw were making her and her mate pay for breaking the code. She stopped grooming Oakheart and the two lay there, not saying a word.

Bluefur woke up, realising she had dozed off. She stretched and got to her paws. Oakheart had left. She looked up and realised Hailstar was about to call a Clan meeting. Her stomach lurched. Was he going to announce the deputy?! It was still the afternoon!

Then she noticed Whitepaw was sitting in the clearing as well. He still looked a bit sick and tired but he stood tall as he stared at his leader.

"One of the best moments as a leader is naming a new warrior. Yesterday, Whitepaw fell into the flooding river but was extremely brave. He definitely deserves his warrior name. Whitepaw, step forwards."

The apprentice stepped forwards shakily, his eyes gleaming. Hailstar dipped his head.

"I, Hailstar, Leader of RiverClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down upon this apprentice. He has learned to understand and respect the ways of your noble code, and I commend him to you as a warrior in his turn. Whitepaw, do you promise to uphold the ways of our noble code, and to protect and defend this Clan with your life?"

Whitepaw dipped his head. "I do, Hailstar."

"Then from this day on, you will be known as Whiteclaw. StarClan honours your kindness and loyalty and we welcome you as a full warrior of RiverClan."

Whiteclaw lifted his chin as the Clan called his name. Bluefur raised her voice to cheer for her former apprentice. She padded over, not saying anything and nuzzling his cheek.

"You were such a great mentor," Whiteclaw purred. "Thank you."

Bluefur only dipped her head, turning and padding back into the crowd. Her tail drooped as she sat down at the edge of the camp.

She watched cats congratulating the new warrior. Though she felt proud, she felt even sadder about the fact Thrushpelt would never see him get his warrior name. She knew how fond the warrior was of Whiteclaw.

Quietly the blue-grey warrior turned and sat guard for the camp, until the sunset.

By the time the sun had begun to set, Bluefur was almost asleep. She drifted off for a few seconds and then snapped out of it and continued to guard. A few times she thought she had seen Mapleshade or Thistleclaw, but dismissed it as paranoia. Even if they were here, she would fight with her life to make sure they never got inside the camp.

Bluefur turned around as she realised Hailstar had called another Clan meeting, and she was sure this one was about who was going to be the new Deputy.

Hailstar sat down on the highrock, looking down at his Clan with a proud look in his eye. *How amazing it would be to stand up there,* she thought. *Looking down on the whole Clan.*

"All cats old enough to swim, gather under the highrock for a Clan meeting!"

The Clan gathered, curiosity and excitement mingling in their gazes and postures. Hailstar lifted his chin.

"I say these words before Crookedjaw, so he may hear and approve my choice. The new Deputy of RiverClan will be..."

His gaze travelled the Clan, and Bluefur wondered if it had maybe just rested on hers for a second. The Leader inhaled deeply and then finished.

"Bluefur."

Bluefur felt a lurch in her stomach and then stood up, enjoying and basking in her Clanmates praise. For once in the days since Thrushpelt had passed, she felt truly proud and happy.

She was now the Deputy of RiverClan. Maybe she had a shot at destroying Thistleclaw and his followers.

Chapter Eleven

"Okay, Stonefur. You lead a patrol with Whitefang, Petaldust and Leopardfur. Patrol the WindClan border."

Bluefur stood on the highrock, calling out the patrols. It had been a quarter moon since she was named the new deputy, and to be honest, she was loving it. She was enjoying assigning the patrols for the day and was excited for the full moon gathering tonight.

Stonefur nodded and flicked with his tail for his patrol to follow him. Bluefur hardly noticed. She was so excited to see Thistleclaw's face when she was announced. Then she'd get revenge for all he did. She flexed her claws, a smirk on her face.

Quickly she leapt down from the rock, shaking her fur and padding over to the warriors' den, the energy in her eyes to be washed away by concern. "Oakheart?" she murmured as she entered. Sympathy pierced her heart as she saw the warrior curled in a ball. She licked him between the ears, murmuring a quick 'love you' and leaving once more. She felt a little more downhearted than when she entered, but with determination in her expression, she narrowed her eyes and trotted out of camp.

Bluefur sat next to the river, closing her eyes. She sat there for a while, just listening to the river move. She rather enjoyed it, the calm noise and the sun warming her pelt. She leaned down once or twice to lap at the water or catch a fish or she would hop into the water to cool down, but other than that she didn't do much else. She half expected a ThunderClan patrol to jump out so she kept an ear pricked and alert, but there were no cats to be seen. She grew restless suddenly, her paws itching to run. So she did. There were no scent marks anywhere and no cats patrolling, and her paws were carrying her to ThunderClan camp. She paused at the entrance. There were cats like usual inside, but none of them noticed her. They all looked very unfamiliar. *Am I that not used to ThunderClan cats?* She thought disbelievingly. The Leader looked nothing like

Sunstar. He was a dark brown tom with green eyes that scanned the camp. Then they rested on a she-cat walking out of the nursery with three kits who looked very familiar yet not.

"Who is the father of your kits?" The leader snarled. "Tell the truth!"

The familiar she-cat tried to reply, but before she could a brown she-cat with freckles on her face and back ran over, confusion in her eyes. "We know it's Birchface!" The freckled cat called out. "Why are you asking this?

The leader's eyes narrowed. "I want Mapleshade to tell the truth," he hissed quietly.

Bluefur's ears pricked. Mapleshade! That's who the familiar cat was. This must've been what had happened to her.

After a bit of talking, the freckled she-cat leapt onto Mapleshade with a yowl of rage. "What have you done?!" She yowled.

"Frecklewish, please!" Mapleshade whimpered. Frecklewish was pushed off by two cats, and Mapleshade listened, cringing, to Frecklewish's spitting words.

Mapleshade turned and left with her kits following, and Bluefur was suddenly at sunningrocks. Mapleshade and her kits were jumping to RiverClan's side while the river was flooded! Bluefur watched in horror as a kit slipped and fell. She leapt in after the kit and tried to grab her scruff, but went right through the kit. She paddled back up and took a big breath, making it to the RiverClan side and watching with terror as Mapleshade tried to save her drowning kits.

Then Bluefur found herself in RiverClan camp, with Mapleshade pleading for the RiverClan leader to let her in. A cream tom watched with a scowl and narrowed eyes. He explained himself and Mapleshade was forced to leave. Bluefur shut her eyes as over and over, every second, three dead cats flashed in her vision. A ThunderClan tom, Frecklewish and the RiverClan tom. Over and over, with the toms' throats torn out and Frecklewish being bitten by a snake.

Her eyes snapped open as the visions faded and she found herself face to face with Mapleshade, who looked so much older and more scarred. Mapleshade's eyes shone with insanity, driven mad by endless nights alone with her thoughts.

"Don't you agree none of that should have happened?" Mapleshade cackled. "Why did it happen to me, not you?! Imagine if it were *your* kits in that river!"

Bluefur had another vision that shot quickly and painfully into her head. Her kits drowning in the river, her getting kicked out of RiverClan, and her needing vengeance on the cats who betrayed her. Bluefur shook her head, realising her claws were sinking into the grass, ripping up pieces. She sheathed them again, glaring at Mapleshade. "Well-well it didn't!" She snarled. "Stop doing this to me!"

Mapleshade grinned. "You felt it. The need to kill cats who harmed your kits. You feel it at Thistleclaw, for killing Thrushpelt."

The horrible she-cat leaned in. "If you do manage to do it," she whispered. "I'll be the first to welcome you to the dark forest."

Bluefur's eyes widened in horror and her tail moved between her legs. Mapleshade was gone.

The Deputy of ThunderClan woke with a start next to the river. *It was just a dream*, she repeated in her mind. But she couldn't rid the cold feeling that Mapleshade was right.

She couldn't kill Thistleclaw. At least, not now.

--

Bluefur sat next to Hailstar as he announced the cats who would be going to the gathering, her ears pricked. She tried her hardest to forget the dream she had earlier that day and how it had ruffled her fur so much. Was she really anything like Mapleshade, a killer and a cat that resided in the dark forest?!

"Right," Hailstar grunted. "Let's go."

Bluefur snapped back to the present and nodded, following Hailstar and making sure the rest of the Clan was behind her. The cats chosen to go to the gathering quietly muttered among themselves. Bluefur glanced at Hailstar. "What are they talking about back there?"

Hailstar smiled. "Their own dramas, probably. I tend not to get too involved," he answered. Then he turned to the hollow with the fourtrees. He flicked his tail.

And the cats raced down into the gathering place.

Chapter Twelve

Bluefur raced after Hailstar into the gathering area and waited for everyone else to come down before padding off to talk to someone. She inhaled deeply and decided to approach Rosetail, her former best friend from ThunderClan. Anxiety wormed in her stomach as she padded over to the she-cat.

Rosetail looked up, surprise flashing in her eyes. "Bluefur," she greeted curtly.

Bluefur's ears flattened by the ice in her voice. "I- uh- hi, Rosetail," she stammered, looking at her paws. Rosetail didn't reply, only turning to talk to Swiftbreeze.

"How are you?" Bluefur blurted. "I've missed you."

Rosetail turned her head sharply, her eyes wide. "You have?" she asked, her voice softening. Then she shook her head. "Then you shouldn't have left," she hissed.

Bluefur looked away. "I'll go now," she mumbled, embarrassed.

Rosetail only nodded, turning once more to talk to Swiftbreeze. As Bluefur padded away sadly, she wondered what other ThunderClan cats' reactions would be. Maybe she could try talking to her nephew?

As she thought that, the young white tom's voice sounded nearby. He sounded boastful and proud about something. She walked over quietly, listening without making a sound.

"And then I slammed him into the ground!" Whitestorm exclaimed, showing his teeth. "That kittypet got such a fright, I know he'll never come back!"

Petaldust's eyes widened. "It sounds like you attacked a kit!" She

hissed.

Whitestorm blinked, dropping back onto all fours. "Kits become cats. And cats can destroy us," he meowed simply.

Bluefur couldn't keep in her scoff. "But he wasn't a full grown cat *then*!" She protested. The second she said that she realised she made a mistake.

Whitestorm turned and stared at her. "Bluefur," he meowed, dipping his head. "How's RiverClan? The fish are well, I assume?"

Bluefur's eyes widened in anger. "Pardon me?"

Whitestorm smiled, his tail resting neatly over his paws. "I said: the fish are well, I assume?"

Bluefur didn't move. "Is that supposed to mean something?" She meowed softly.

"I guess you're asking me not to sugarcoat it," he sighed, shaking his head. "You've grown rather plump. Are you having another litter with Oakheart? Or maybe his brother now?"

Bluefur felt an urge to rake Whitestorm's arrogant face with her claws. What had Thistleclaw done to him?! But she just met his gaze calmly. "Crookedjaw is dead," she meowed flatly.

Bluefur was rewarded with a flash of surprise and genuine sympathy in Whitestorm's eyes. "I'm very sorry, Bluefur," he murmured, casting a quick glance in the direction of Tigerclaw and Thistleclaw. When Tigerclaw met his eye, he looked away.

Confused, Bluefur dipped her head. "Thank you, but we don't need sympathy. We're doing fine."

Whitestorm nodded. "Of course. I think Tigerclaw needs me now," he meowed suddenly, his tail beginning to lash and eyes beginning to widen. "Bye, Bluefur."

"Goodbye, Whitestorm," Bluefur replied, thoroughly confused on what just happened with Whitestorm. She shook her head and

shrugged. It didn't matter. She turned to find another cat to talk to but was interrupted by Cedarstar, ShadowClan's leader.

"It's time to start the gathering!" Cedarstar yowled. Bluefur quickly scrambled near the front of the crowd, nearby the other deputies and the medicine cats. She turned her head and caught Spottedpaw's eye, who looked down at her paws. Furrowing her eyebrows, the blue-grey deputy turned to see Cedarstar reporting.

"We have not much to report," the leader meowed, with narrowed eyes. "Prey is running well and we have been thoroughly guarding our territory borders. That is all."

Heatherstar of WindClan flicked her tail. "We have a new Deputy, Talltail. Reedfeather left to join the elders."

"Talltail! Talltail!" The Clan cats chanted loudly. Bluefur looked at Talltail and gave him a smile. He seemed to be pretty popular with the Clans. Talltail returned the smile, to Bluefur's relief. It was a kind and warm smile and Bluefur thought maybe RiverClan and WindClan could become allies with them both as leaders.

After Heatherstar stepped back, Sunstar stepped forward. "ThunderClan is doing fine," he purred. "Spottedpaw, our medicine cat apprentice, is now Spottedleaf."

"Spottedleaf! Spottedleaf!" Bluefur joined in the chant, glancing once more at Spottedleaf. *What is she hiding?* The deputy wondered.

Now Hailstar began to speak. He chose his words carefully as he reported how RiverClan was doing. "In a battle with sunningrocks, Thrushpelt was killed-"

The Leader was cut off by yowls of surprise and anger. "But that's against the warrior code!" A warrior called. Bluefur silently agreed with the young warrior but didn't say anything out loud.

Hailstar continued, looking slightly awkward. "We miss him very much. Yesterday morning Crookedjaw was also murdered, but we don't know how."

"Sounds like RiverClan can't keep their cats under control!" A cat

yowled boastfully. Bluefur hissed. Thistleclaw was glaring up at Hailstar with fiery eyes.

Hailstar looked like he wanted to spit a bunch of insults at the ThunderClan deputy, but he kept his mouth shut.

"Our new Deputy is Bluefur," he finally finished, sitting back down with a final glare at Thistleclaw.

Silence.

Bluefur shrunk down as Thistleclaw's gloating disappeared, to be replaced by cold, hard anger. He scanned the crowd for Bluefur, and when their gazes met he got to his paws. He stalked over, his sharp claws out.

"Do you not remember, Hailstar," Thistleclaw began, blinking innocently. "When Bluefur left her kin and place in ThunderClan to be in RiverClan, that traitor? Why is a cat who betrayed her birth Clan a Deputy now? What happened?!"

Yowls of anger and disapproval rang out, drowning out any confused meowing. Hailstar watched for a moment, then anger flared in his eyes once more.

"I don't think you've realised how many times Bluefur has defended RiverClan. Time and time again she could have died to protect this Clan, so you have no right to insult her like this!" The leader snarled.

Thistleclaw looked up at the sky. No clouds were covering the moon and the sky was clear. Panic fluttered briefly in his amber eyes, then he shrugged. "Good luck as deputy then, Bluefur," he meowed silkily.

As if it were a signal, the clan started to cheer for Bluefur. It didn't feel good, with everything that happened before. Then she looked up at Hailstar, who bunched his muscles to leap off of the rock. "Let's go, RiverClan," he grunted, already leaving.

Bluefur began to signal with her tail for the cats to leave. As they padded out of fourtrees, Bluefur began to worry. The Clans all knew

she was a deputy. What would happen to her now?

Chapter Thirteen

"I'm sorry, I-"

Rosetail and Whitestorm stalked around her as she lay on the ground, a large gash opened in her throat. Blood bubbled up in her mouth and she began to cough up the sticky liquid.

"We don't forgive you," Rosetail and Whitestorm hissed at the same time, leaning in.

Then all was black.

Bluefur woke up with a start, jumping to her paws and realising she had shredded her moss in the night. *Great,* she thought. *Another nightmare.*

She angrily stalked out of the den. It was dawn. She yawned, sitting down and grooming herself. Her ears pricked as she saw Hailstar walk out of his den. She greeted him with a nod and he returned it.

"You feeling better?" She asked kindly.

Hailstar smiled and nodded. "Yes. Are you alright? There seems to be something on your mind."

Bluefur hesitated. "Whitestorm and Rosetail," she blurted after a few moments. "I finally went to visit them this gathering and they both hated me."

Hailstar looked at her sympathetically and Bluefur felt whiny for telling him this. She shuffled her paws.

"Whitestorm was passive aggressive and Rosetail was cold," she murmured. "My nephew and my best friend..."

Hailstar lay his tail on her shoulder. "Maybe they know that you

can't be friends anymore and that if they are friends with you again then they'll grow attached," he suggested calmly. "It's nothing against you."

"Just the choices I make," she muttered bitterly.

Hailstar opened his mouth to reply, then shrugged. "Cats are beginning to come out of their dens. You'd better start organising the patrols. See you later, Bluefur."

Bluefur nodded. "Bye."

--

She stalked forwards, her eyes on the mouse. She tucked her paws in and held her tail still. She waited, waited, waited. Then she leapt.

"Good catch!" Bluefur purred from across the border. Rosetail looked up quickly. The pride in her gaze changed to irritation.

"What are you doing here?" She hissed. "Have you been watching me?!"

Bluefur took a step back. "No, I just arrived. I was just trying to help," she hissed.

Rosetail snorted. "Go away."

Bluefur frowned. "Rosetail, please. It was for the best. You could come with me! After a while, you'd be respected, and-"

"I'm loyal to ThunderClan," Rosetail snarled. "And I miss you too, but we're from different Clans. I'm not a traitor."

Bluefur winced as Rosetail turned her back on the deputy. She stalked off with the mouse hanging from her jaws. Bluefur sighed, turning away as well and scampering off.

As Bluefur walked back to camp, she scented ThunderClan and began to bristle. Her walk turned into a run, which became a sprint. She skidded into the camp to see ThunderClan cats fighting RiverClan. She shook her head and yowled, launching herself into

the battle. She found herself leaping at Adderfang, pinning him down and spitting in his face. "Why is Sunstar doing this?! I thought he was fair!"

Adderfang snorted. "Of course *Sunstar* wouldn't launch a needed attack on you fish-faces! Thistleclaw will be our leader soon, and he launched this attack on you traitors!"

Bluefur snarled, digging her claws in deeper. She clawed at his shoulder and at his belly fur, and he kicked her off with strong legs. She leapt at him but was grabbed by the scruff before she could touch him. She kicked and slashed, but she couldn't fight back. A paw raised up and she felt it hit her head before everything went black.

"Wake up," a voice snarled.

Bluefur opened her eyes, confused. "Where am I?" She murmured.

"Bluefur!"

Bluefur's eyes snapped open and she realised immediately she was in the dark forest again. She watched silently as Thistleclaw trained with Mapleshade. The she-cats ears pricked up and she stalked over. "Bluefur," she meowed smoothly. "How are you going?"

"Go away," Bluefur snarled. "Go train with Thistleclaw."

Mapleshade snarled, then smiled. "But you're so much better," she whined.

"Go away, fox-heart!" The deputy snapped, her tail bushing up.

After Mapleshade left her alone, she walked, ignoring her warnings. She walked, and none of the forests seemed to change. The same trees and rivers passed her, but it was the only thing she wanted to do in this terrible world. But nothing happened. Bluefur began to realise that Mapleshade had gone insane from this forest. She was alone. All alone. She'd be here forever and ever and ever and-

She padded over to Thistleclaw and Mapleshade, confused. She was walking away from them, wasn't she? Would she be doomed to

walk in circles forever? She began to panic, breathing heavily. She collapsed, covering her eyes with her paws. Would she become Bluestar, one of the evil leaders of the Clans? Would no-one remember her for what she was? Would she be driven mad by grief? Would she become like Mapleshade? Like Thistleclaw?

Or maybe she'd be a noble leader like Sunstar or Hailstar. Maybe she'd be respected by everyone and would show them she's not a traitor. Maybe Rosetail would forgive her and then they would be best friends again. Maybe thanks to her all of the four Clans would live together in peace.

Bluefur calmed down a little, enough to start fading away. But before she could, a paw was placed down on her throat. She began to choke, willing herself to start fading away more. If she died here, would she truly die? Panic began to rise in her chest again and she forced it down. She began to fade once more, even if the paw was holding down extremely tightly. She closed her eyes and relaxed, reassuring herself by saying everything would be fine when she woke up. *Everything will be alright,* she repeated in her head. *I'll be back in camp with Oakheart and Mossdapple and Mistyfoot and Stonefur.*

But the paw held tighter still and Bluefur began to see black at the edges of her vision when she opened her eyes. She was going to die, right here in the dark forest, and she would live there forever, and-

No. She just needed to stay calm. She completely lay limp, closing her eyes. And sure enough, she felt like she wasn't in the world of the dark forest anymore. She was safe.

When she woke up, she was in ThunderClan camp.

Chapter Fourteen

"Why am I here?!" Bluefur exclaimed, staring wide-eyed out of the den. She was a prisoner in ThunderClan's camp, and she had no idea how.

"Wow, my muscles ache," a voice huffed from outside. Whitestorm! Hopefully, he'd... no, he hated her now. He'd never let her go out. She looked at the guard. Redtail sat at the entrance of the den. He turned around and stared at Bluefur. "Shut up," he hissed through gritted teeth, eyes wide in panic. "We're having a meeting."

Bluefur strained to look outside at the meeting. She saw Sunstar, staring down at ThunderClan with anger in his eyes, and Thistleclaw looking up at him with a smirk. Her ears pricked and she was desperate to know what was going on.

"What were you doing?!" Sunstar snarled. "Leading an attack on RiverClan and taking one of their warriors *hostage*?! What were you thinking, you bee-brain!"

Thistleclaw smoothed down some fur on his back. "I was thinking it was time for RiverClan to get what they deserved," he drawled. "After all, at least two of their warriors are traitors."

Bluefur scowled as Thistleclaw motioned with his head to the den she lay in. But she didn't dare move. Redtail leaned in, listening to every word intently.

"Does this happen a lot?" Bluefur asked, half to herself.

Redtail nodded. "Sunstar and Thistleclaw have quite a few... disagreements. But they work together pretty great if they both agree on something!" He purred, adding quietly, "Which is extremely rare."

Bluefur didn't realise how much the deputy and leader didn't get on. Maybe she could've become the leader of ThunderClan if she just

stayed. Shame crawled beneath her pelt. Now cats hated her.

A she-cat poked her head into the den. "I got you a mouse," Rosetail hissed. "Sunstar's orders, not my idea."

Bluefur caught the mouse as Rosetail flung it over, nodding to her gratefully. But she was already gone. She quietly listened to the argument as she ate, holding on to every word. Would she be let out?

Then she heard Sunstar hack and cough, and Featherwhisker run over to help him, stroking his back with his tail and asking Spottedleaf to get tansy. Why didn't they just use catmint?

"Well, Sunstar, my idea was that we could bargain with those fish-faces," Thistleclaw purred, examining his claws.

Sunstar lapped up the tansy, then shakily got to his paws. "How so?" he rasped, looking disinterested.

Thistleclaw grinned. "There's no catmint on our territory, right? But there is on theirs. They probably have some in their den! So we could say we'll give back Bluefur if they give us catmint. It's perfect," he exclaimed.

Bluefur sniffed in annoyance. She was going to be bargained with, like prey? This didn't seem at all reasonable. But she held her tongue, just glaring at the ThunderClan deputy.

Thistleclaw could definitely feel the heat of her stare but chose to ignore it. "So?" He questioned with sparkling eyes. "What do you think?"

Sunstar was nodding slowly, to Bluefur's disappointment. "It could work. We have cats dying and this might be our last option," he sighed.

Thistleclaw's eyes were sparkling with excitement. "Perfect. I'll send a patrol-"

Sunstar shook his head. "No. I'll send a patrol with cats who didn't fight with RiverClan. Runningwind, Spottedleaf and Lionheart,

come with me. No one else leaves. Rosetail, swap with Redtail. We'll be back soon."

Sunstar padded out of camp, stumbling once or twice but still making it up. Dread hollowed out Bluefur's stomach as Rosetail padded over and swapped places with Redtail.

"Hi-" Bluefur began.

"You're a prisoner," Rosetail snapped. "You don't talk."

Bluefur rested her chin on her paws, sighing. Her eyes widened as Rosetail's head turned. The she-cat's eyes were soft.

"I missed you so much." Rosetail's voice was barely a whisper. "Why did you leave me?"

"I had to, StarClan told me to, and-"

"StarClan told you to?" Rosetail's voice was slightly mocking, and her tail was lashing. "What about me? Doesn't StarClan care about me?"

Bluefur sighed. "Yes, but-"

"You were my best friend, Bluefur!" Rosetail hissed.

"Yeah, tough, but I lost my mother and my sister and my best friend who left with me to RiverClan! He was killed by my former Clanmates!" Bluefur snapped, her eyes glistening with fury. "So you don't have it bad."

Rosetail recoiled, realising what she had said. She hung her head, not saying a word. Her claws tore at the grass. Bluefur watched the motion for StarClan knows how long. She didn't have anything better to do.

"Sorry," Bluefur mumbled.

"Why are you sorry?" Rosetail asked, genuine surprise and curiosity in her tone. "I'm the one who should be sorry."

Moments passed.

"So?" Bluefur queried.

"What?"

"Are you sorry, then?" The RiverClan deputy joked.

Rosetail's whiskers twitched. "Yeah. Sorry for being a bee-brain," she meowed, hanging her head. Bluefur smiled. "It's okay."

Rosetail and Bluefur sat in silence, not saying a word to each other. Bluefur realised she felt homesick, even though she was in the place she was born. She sighed. "I wonder how it's going back in RiverClan," she murmured, half to herself.

"Are they nice there?" Rosetail asked with a smile.

"Extremely," Bluefur purred. "Oakheart's the best. I feel so bad for him because of Crookedjaw, but he's surviving fine. Mossdapple is so smart and gentle and such a talented medicine cat. Mistyfoot is my little diplomat, she keeps rash Stonefur in check, but Stonefur is so strong and brave and nothing scares him. If I'm ever worried, I can go to Hailstar and he's really supportive. He's so kind, they all are, and..."

Bluefur shut her mouth apologetically. "I'm sorry. I was rambling. But the truth is when I joined I never thought I'd be respected. And here I am now, Deputy of RiverClan," she purred weakly.

"I think the patrol is back," Rosetail murmured, sitting up straight. "Soon you'll be going back home! Back to RiverClan, with your kits and your mate and kind Hailstar and..."

Bluefur flinched. Was that bitterness in her voice?

Rosetail shrugged. "It sounds nice there. But do you really eat fish?"

Bluefur chuckled. "It's good. You should try it!"

"Ewww!" Rosetail purred. Bluefur smiled. She would be home, and she was on good terms with Rosetail. Being back in ThunderClan

made her realise how much she loved her home back in RiverClan.

And soon I'll be back with my kin, she reflected with a purr. *Away from Thistleclaw.*

Chapter Fifteen

Hailstar glared at Sunstar with fiery eyes. He flicked his tail and turned to pad off into the forest. Quickly and quietly, Bluefur followed. Relief washed over her as they crossed the border. She was home now. As the leader and deputy padded through the RiverClan territory, Bluefur realised how strange ThunderClan's forest was to her now. If she was forced to stay there, she felt she'd never get used to it.

Bluefur visibly relaxed as they entered RiverClan camp. "Is everyone okay?" She asked.

Hailstar nodded. "We're managing," he reported. "I'm enraged ThunderClan would dare attack our camp and take our deputy prisoner though. What was going through Sunstar's mind?!"

Bluefur's tail flicked. "I heard what happened back in their camp. Sunstar didn't condone it at all, I think. It was Thistleclaw's idea."

Hailstar snorted. "Then Sunstar should control his Deputy. Thistleclaw is acting like he's already a leader. I'm so glad a cat like him isn't my deputy," he chuckled.

Bluefur purred. "I share your view. When I was in ThunderClan, I could not *stand* him!"

"We're back," Hailstar announced. "Those ThunderClan mouse-brains, taking our deputy!"

Bluefur nodded in agreement. "But I'm back now, and it's time to rebuild the camp."

The deputy started to organise patrols once more, determination blazing in her blue eyes. Cats nodded and started to head out and rebuild the camp. Bluefur's tail lashed, yelling out advice and help for cats that had to work inside.

"Make the entrance more guarded," she ordered Whiteclaw, who nodded. "ThunderClan will not make it in here if we don't know about it!"

As the cats worked, Bluefur jumped down from the rock and walked over to Oakheart, who was lying down in camp and doing nothing. He looked up at her, probably expecting her to say something snappy. She would've if it was anyone but her mate. "Hey," she meowed softly. "You okay?"

Oakheart buried his face in his paws. "Of course not," he murmured. "He's dead."

Bluefur nudged him with a paw. "Crookedjaw will not be less dead if you grieve for him. He would definitely prefer if you didn't mope around all day," she sighed.

Oakheart looked up at her with angered eyes. "What in StarClan?! My brother is dead!"

Bluefur sighed. "I'm sorry to be harsh, but it's true. He would prefer you served your Clan instead of lying down and crying into your paws."

Oakheart got to his paws. "Fine," he hissed. "I'll go work if that's what Crookedjaw wants." As he walked away, Bluefur heard him mutter, "You hardly knew Crookedjaw anyways."

Bluefur blocked Oakheart's way. "I may not have known him as much as you, but I know him. And he would want you to serve your Clan. Grieving is natural, but we need all our warriors with ThunderClan looking for a fight."

Oakheart's eyes fired up. "Of course, O' wise one! I was about to do what Crookedjaw- or you- told me to do, but you're blocking me! And you're seeming like such a leader, maybe Crookedjaw would like it if I just bowed down to you?"

Bluefur recoiled, taken aback. "Great StarClan," she whispered, moving out of the way. She stared after her mate as he stalked off, sighing in resignation. She felt a tail tip on her shoulder and turned

to see Mistyfoot staring after Oakheart next to her. "He'll realise he's talking nonsense soon," her daughter purred.

Bluefur's ears pricked up in surprise. "Since when did you get so wise?" She teased. "You have no right! You're not nearly as old as I am."

Mistyfoot laughed. "You're not old!"

Bluefur snickered. "So you say! Now get back to your work!"

Mistyfoot poked her tongue out teasingly and then trotted off. The interaction with her kit made her feel a bit better. Bluefur jumped back onto the highrock, her encouragement was softer and more genuine. It seemed to help the cats working, and Bluefur watched with pride as patrols walked into camp with prey and the camp began to look better and less destroyed. Bluefur walked over to the hunting patrol that returned. "Great work, guys!" She purred. "You can go rest and eat!"

Beetlenose dipped his head and the patrol padded in different directions. Bluefur grinned. "ThunderClan won't get to us again!" She purred, eyes sparkling. "We will make sure of it."

Hailstar padded into camp a while later when the cats were sharing tongues. Bluefur lay down, eating a fish and thinking about the day before. She was told Hailstar would come the next day so she slept in her prisoner's den, being woken up by Whitestorm in the morning. He took her outside, not saying a word and not meeting her gaze. She tried to talk to him but he interrupted her.

The cats in ThunderClan seemed so foreign now. So strange and different Sunstar was from Hailstar. Bluefur purred. She was so glad that she was in RiverClan now, with new friends and her kits. And Mistyfoot was right. Oakheart would feel better soon and everything would be fine. Maybe Thistleclaw wouldn't become leader, and the Clans would be safe.

Bluefur was snapped back to the present by Hailstar sitting down next to her. "Hi, Bluefur," he purred.

Bluefur waved her tail in greeting, smiling.

"What was ThunderClan like?" He asked, lying down next to her. "As a prisoner, I mean."

"Really strange," Bluefur confessed. "They're all so different and..."

Hailstar tipped his head to one side, waiting for her to reply.

"So bossy!" She exclaimed with a chuckle.

The leader laughed in agreement. "Yeah, they really are. Was it awkward, with cats you knew? Did you see Rosetail and Whitestorm?"

Bluefur sighed in relief. "Yes. I saw them. With Whitestorm we didn't talk at all but I made up with Rosetail. It was really great, and it made me feel a lot better!"

Hailstar purred. "That's really great! I'm glad you're back though. The camp's looking a lot better than this morning."

Bluefur nodded. "I'm really glad I'm back too," is all she said, closing her eyes.

She really meant it. She couldn't imagine being in ThunderClan anymore, and she was so glad she was in RiverClan with her new kin. She might've been wanting to go back to ThunderClan and dissatisfied with RiverClan a few days ago, but now she couldn't imagine being anywhere else. She was content and happy with where she was, and who she was with.

Chapter Sixteen

Bluefur watched the swollen river, the sun seeming now obnoxious in green-leaf. She scowled as the rays beat down on her fur, making her hot and bothered. It seemed like the best time to go for a swim, but the river was overflowing and Bluefur had to worry now about there being a flood.

"It will most likely flood," Stonefur confirmed, approaching Bluefur with a concerned look in his eyes. Bluefur sighed, resigned. "Then we'll just have to get ready for when that happens," She decided, lifting her head. "Make sure every cat back at camp knows that there might be a flood that reaches the camp and make sure no-one is worried about it."

Stonefur nodded determinedly. "Okay," he meowed, jumping off into the bushes.

As Bluefur sat next to the river, awful visions suddenly flashed into her head. Water flooding the camp, cats trying desperately to swim, a body that Bluefur tried to identify-

She shook her head of the visions and scampered off into the undergrowth. She got away from the swirling black water and blinked as the visions went away. Then she ran almost right into Mapleshade.

"Bluefur. Lovely to see you here," Mapleshade greeted. "How are you doing?"

Bluefur scowled, turning away. "Leave me alone, Mapleshade," she hissed, surprised that her voice sounded a little desperate. "Please."

Mapleshade blinked. "Oh but why, darling? You love having Mapleshade around, don't you?" she called after Bluefur, an almost menacing tone in her voice.

Bluefur swung her head around to glower at the evil she-cat. "No, I don't need you around. Go away and leave me alone for the rest of my life, please and thank you."

Mapleshade watched as she padded away and appeared right in front of the deputy as she was out of sight.

"You can't get rid of me that easy, Bluefur. I thought you would have known that by now!" Mapleshade sighed. Her tail lashed. "You're not stupid, are you?"

Bluefur slashed at Mapleshade's cheek, spilling blood. Mapleshade stared at her with surprised eyes and then, with rage in her eyes, she disappeared.

Bluefur flicked her tail and stalked away, a growl rising in her throat. Her tail lashed as she followed the river, around to the border next to WindClan territory. It went out a lot more than it usually did, making Bluefur feel uncomfortable. She dipped her paw into the swollen water, relaxing. It was so cold and refreshing and made her feel great. She moved more into the water, eventually wading in it, the water brushing her belly fur.

"Hey, what are you doing?!" A voice yowled.

Bluefur yelped and scampered out of the water as a WindClan patrol approached, with Talltail at the lead. Bluefur dipped her head.

"Talltail," she greeted. "How are you doing?"

Talltail seemed to relax. "Bluefur. I'm well. How is RiverClan?" The WindClan cat asked, tipping his head to one side.

"RiverClan is doing well, thank you!" Bluefur purred. "It's so hot, I thought I'd go for a swim."

Talltail shook his head jokingly. "I don't get you RiverClan cats. Well, good to know you guys are alright," he meowed, waving his tail. "Right, let's go check the ShadowClan border."

Bluefur watched the WindClan cats leave, sitting down and

beginning to groom herself. She listened to the paw steps as they padded away and looked down at the swollen river. *What do my visions mean?* She wondered nervously. *What bad things will happen to RiverClan?*

--

Bluefur walked back to camp with her tail tip twitching. Inside the camp, Oakheart was helping build the camp, she walked over, happy that he was walking, but as she opened her mouth to greet him, he turned his head to glare at her. "So you've finally shown up. Seems like you were sunning yourself while the rest of us were working."

Bluefur was taken aback. "I was patrolling the river to see how it had overflown!" She defended herself with a hiss.

Oakheart dismissed her argument with a flick of his ear. "How do we know that? You might've been sitting in the river and not doing anything else," he scowled at Bluefur's dripping wet pelt.

"So what if I took a break to swim?" Bluefur hissed, exasperated. "It's extremely hot. If any of you took a break to dip in the water I wouldn't mind!"

Oakheart snarled. "Why is it our deputy gets to sit in the river lazily while she orders us to work all day?" He meowed loudly.

"I was taking a break! If anyone wants to do that now or any time for a few minutes, then they can!" Bluefur yowled back.

Stonefur trotted over to the brown tom, resting his tail tip on his shoulder. "Oakheart, you might be grumpy because of the heat. Come and swim with me."

Oakheart, after a brief hesitation, nodded and walked off after his son, shooting a glare at Bluefur as he left. Bluefur sighed, her tail lashing. His brilliant amber gaze was so much like Thistleclaw's. She dug her claws into the ground and glared back at Oakheart with as much fury as his gaze held.

But as she watched Oakheart, her eyes narrowed, she began to feel

her chest tighten. She could hardly hear or see her other Clanmates, focusing on the way Oakheart's amber eyes were cold and furious as he stared at her. She began to bristle and lash her tail more. The visions flashed back into her mind, but even more vivid. A tom desperately trying to make his way from the sucking waters, her watching with terrified eyes, the waters making her unable to swim, and-

She shook them clear. It didn't matter. What mattered was now. Bluefur almost smiled wryly. Not like now was any better. She stared after her mate as he stalked off, his fluffy tail lashing and gaze staring right at her even when he wasn't looking at her. She could feel the heat of his gaze, hanging her head in embarrassment.

Would things ever be right again with Bluefur and her mate? Would they ever have the same loving relationship they had once before?

Bluefur turned to walk off. He was just grieving. Everything would turn out fine soon.

Right?

Chapter Seventeen

Thistleclaw watched Sunstar on his pedestal: the highledge. He snarled, sinking his claws deep into the ground. Soon the crown of leadership would be *his*, and he would be one step closer to taking over the four Clans. Sunstar looked down and met his gaze, a challenge in his eyes. He seemed to be saying *if you want to become a leader soon, you'll have to kill me, and I doubt you can do that.*

Thistleclaw scowled and turned on the ginger tom, stalking out of camp. As he padded through the ThunderClan forest, he turned and saw Tigerclaw trotting after him. "Hi," he meowed cheerfully.

Thistleclaw dipped his head and stared at his friend through narrowed eyes. "Yes, Tigerclaw?"

Tigerclaw shrugged. "Whitestorm's hanging out with Willowpelt *again*, so I thought I'd hang out with you."

Thistleclaw nodded curtly. "He seems to really be fancing her, hm?" He scowled. "If he wants to follow in his father's pawsteps, he shouldn't be running after she-cats!"

Tigerclaw snorted in agreement. "She-cats!" He sniffed.

Thistleclaw looked up at the stars. The sun was beginning to set. "I've had visions, Tigerclaw. Visions that show flooding, and death. I think it's a sign soon it will be my time," he purred softly. "I will soon rule ThunderClan."

--

Bluefur woke up late in the morning, padding out groggily from the warrior's den. The visions had become even worse now, threatening death for all of RiverClan. They suddenly flashed into her head, giving her a stabbing headache. She hissed from the pain, stumbling into the medicine den. "Help," she rasped as she collapsed in front of Brambleberry.

All went black.

She blinked her eyes open to see Mossdapple standing over her. "Oh good, you're awake!" She announced cheerfully. "How're you feeling?"

Bluefur barely managed to get the words out. "Head... hurts..."

Mossdapple flicked her tail. "Brambleberry, could you get some feverfew, please?"

Looking impressed, Brambleberry trotted off and came back with an unfamiliar herb. Bluefur's breaths were shallow and she felt like she was drifting in and out of unconsciousness. She was faintly aware of the herbs being put in her mouth and instinctively swallowed. After a few moments, she could get a few words out.

"Death," she whispered, feeling hot and yet cold at the same time. "Floods in the camp."

Brambleberry stared down, frightened. "Bluefur, did you have a vision?"

Bluefur's eyes glazed over. "Too many visions, all at once. Drowning and death and floods and-"

Her words were broken off with a sickly cough, and a shuddering breath. She was aware of Mossdapple panicking and Brambleberry trying to convince her to stay calm, but it all seemed so far away from her. She closed her eyes and went to sleep.

--

When Bluefur woke up again, she felt a bit less fever-ridden. She opened her eyes and managed to prop herself up a little. It was raining hard outside, which made her collapse back into her nest. Mossdapple ran over. "Bluefur! Brambleberry told me to give up, but I did it! I saved you! You're not dead!"

Bluefur inhaled sharply as Mossdapple buried her muzzle into the deputy's fur. She purred. "I'm sorry I worried you," she meowed with a gravelly voice.

Mossdapple stepped back, her eyes shining with emotion. "Stonefur and Mistyfoot have been worried sick. They weren't able to do any duties today because of how frightened they were about you."

Bluefur frowned. "And Oakheart?"

Mossdapple broke off, shuffling her paws guiltily. She didn't reply.

"And Oakheart?" Bluefur repeated sharply. "What did he think?"

"He's still grieving," Mossdapple murmured with a guilty look at Bluefur. "He seems to be in his own world right now."

Bluefur scowled. "He didn't say anything?"

Mossdapple gave a tiny nod, frowning deeply.

Bluefur slumped back down into her nest, too tired to talk more about Oakheart. Her tail lashed. Then she inhaled sharply, unsheathing her claws. The visions flashed back into her mind, not bringing with them a headache, but making her scared.

"Is there a flood?" She hissed, eyes wide with terror.

Mossdapple licked her between the ears. "No," she purred. After she turned to get some herbs, she whispered, "Not yet."

Bluefur fidgeted in her nest, ripping apart the moss under her paws. She yearned to be outside, so she very shakily sat up. "Did you have the visions too, Mossdapple?" She asked, her voice sounding far away.

Mossdapple looked out from the herb storage in surprise. "Lie back down, Bluefur," she instructed gently. Bluefur shook her head stubbornly.

"Did you have the visions?" She repeated.

Mossdapple hesitated, then nodded. "Yes."

Bluefur struggled to get to her paws, staring her daughter straight in the eye. "We need to evacuate the camp."

Her headache was getting worse and worse every second, but she forced herself to stay on her paws. Mossdapple seemed to be having the same effects, cringing and looking like she was going to collapse. "I need to tell Hailstar," she decided, her eyes narrowing.

Mossdapple stood up straight. "You can't!" She hissed in surprise. "It's extremely stormy out there!"

"Cats will die!" Bluefur snarled, turning to leave the warm den. "If I die so others don't, then isn't that a good thing?"

Mossdapple's eyes flooded with alarm. "You can't die!" She meowed desperately.

Bluefur sighed. "I won't, but we have to evacuate the camp. *Right now.*"

The deputy saw in Mossdapple's eyes she had given up and couldn't persuade her anymore. She nodded curtly and then stumbled out of the medicine den.

The second she made it out into the camp, rain and wind buffeted her pelt and almost pushed her off of her paws. She almost made it to the leader's den, before her ears pricked and she fell down as a headache almost stabbed her brain. She yowled in pain, unable to get up. The visions were clearer and clearer and-

Bluefur, pelt dripping with water and eyes closed because of the wind. She managed to pry open an eye and squint at what was in front of her, unable to move.

A wave was coming right for her, and the camp. She screamed out in surprise as it drew near very fast. "Evacuate the camp!" She yowled.

Then the wave pulled her under.

Chapter Eighteen

Bluefur thrashed and flailed underneath the water, her head managing to get out of the water once or twice, but then being swept back under. She felt jaws grab onto her scruff, pulling her away. She coughed up water once she was on a surface of rock. She looked up and saw Oakheart, looking down at her with wide, surprised eyes. He shook out his fur, his gaze filling up with determination.

She got to her paws. "Make sure everyone gets out of the camp!" She screeched. She realised she was on the highrock and felt sick as she saw how high the water was rising. She turned her head to see Brambleberry trying to swim, but failing and leapt in after her. Her headaches were gone and she was focused enough to swim. She swam over to Brambleberry and started to push her to shore. When the medicine cat was safe and not in the water, Bluefur was terrified to see her not breathing. "Brambleberry, wake up!" She yowled. "Your Clan needs you!"

But Brambleberry didn't respond, nor did she stir.

Bluefur shook her head and began to push Brambleberry out of camp up onto the hill where the other cats lay. Mossdapple ran over to Brambleberry, trying to push the water out of her chest. Bluefur watched in terror as Brambleberry only lay there. Mossdapple's eyes filled with grief. "She's dead," the medicine cat choked out. Bluefur's stomach lurched. She couldn't be!

Mossdapple quietly lay down next to the dead she-cat, closing her eyes tight and letting out a small sob.

Bluefur looked over Mossdapple to see the faint body of Mapleshade. The tortoiseshell she-cat smiled and disappeared again. Bluefur shook her head and leapt back into the disaster to see if any other cats needed to be saved. She swung her head around and saw Hailstar trying to save Beetlenose. She ran over and helped the leader, noticing how tired he looked. "Go with everyone else. I'll

deal with this!" She yowled above the noise of the wind. Hailstar shook his head. "I can't!"

Bluefur then saw Whiteclaw lying at the bank, looking like he wasn't breathing either. Bluefur was filled with panic, then remembered what Mossdapple tried to do to help Brambleberry. She pushed down on the tom's chest, up and down, up and down and suddenly he vomited up water and got to his paws. "You're safe!" Bluefur yowled. "Go join the others at the hill over there!"

Whiteclaw nodded vigorously, racing off to where the others were. Bluefur ran after him with Hailstar on her heels. They made it to the hill safely, panting and heaving for breath. "We made it-"

Bluefur broke off as she saw Mistyfoot pacing with a worried face. Her eyes were wide in terror and her fur was bushed out to twice its size. She stared at Bluefur and looked even more horrified when Bluefur, Whiteclaw and Hailstar arrived. She ran over to the deputy, horrified. "Where is Reedkit?!" She yowled, ears flat against her head. "We can't find him anywhere! I don't want to lose my kit!"

Bluefur gasped. "Reedkit is missing?!" She hissed.

Hailstar's eyes narrowed and his tail flicked from side to side. "Don't worry, Mistyfoot," he meowed calmly, moving towards her and looking her straight in the eye with a determined gaze. "I will find your kit."

Mistyfoot relaxed slightly but began to pace again, worried about her kit. Bluefur's eyebrows furrowed. "I'll go with Hailstar. The rest of you, make your way towards ThunderClan camp now and tell Sunstar what happened. Stonefur, you lead the way, Beetlenose, you make sure no-one gets lost on the way. Stay at the back please," the deputy ordered. "Make sure everybody is here."

She turned to Mistyfoot, smiling softly. "We'll find your son," she meowed quietly. "I promise."

Mistyfoot nodded. "Please," she whispered.

Bluefur turned and nodded at Hailstar next to her. He nodded back

and the two cats sprinted off int he direction of the camp, their tails streaming behind them and their fur blowing harshly in the strong gale.

--

The camp was in a horrible state when they managed to make it there. Flooded and blown to pieces, Bluefur felt terrified at the thought of a kit in the wreckage. Hailstar turned to her. "If anything happens to either of us, I want you to know I've been honoured to have you as my deputy."

Bluefur's eyes glistened. "Nothing will happen to either of us, I promise."

Hailstar didn't respond. He sprang into the water, paddling strongly against the tide. Bluefur kept her ears pricked for any kit noises, and was rewarded with a mewl from the highrock, which had a kit on it. Bluefur watched in horror as Reedkit slipped and fell into the water. She jumped in to save him, but Hailstar was faster. He swam over and grabbed the kit in his jaws, swimming strongly away from the highrock and to where Bluefur was. As he swam, jaws bit down on one of his paws and Bluefur gasped. Mapleshade!

Hailstar let out a yowl of surprise and looked down. Alarm filled his eyes as he saw Mapleshade. He turned back to Bluefur and flung Reedkit at her. She gasped and swam over to the kit, bringing him to the shore. Hailstar fought with his good paws for Mapleshade to let go, but the tortoiseshell's grip didn't loosen. Bluefur began to lick the kit backwards to warm him up, trying desperately to convince herself that Hailstar was fine and would be alright. But she knew from the way he talked before they went back to camp he guessed he would lose his final life in the flood. She looked up from Reedkit to see Hailstar now fighting even more with Mapleshade. He fell under the water more than once, making Bluefur terrified, but his head broke the surface. Until it didn't and he stayed underneath the water. Bluefur didn't see his face again. She picked up Reedkit and chased after the cats of RiverClan. As she neared them, Mistyfoot's eyes shone with happiness at the sight of her kit, but then dulled down.

"Where's Hailstar?" She asked quietly, looking like she already knew the answer.

Bluefur inhaled deeply.

"Hailstar is dead."

Chapter Nineteen

Bluefur led the Clan into ThunderClan camp, eyes dull and tail drooping. No-one was in camp because of the storm, but when RiverClan walked in cats stuck their heads out of the dens. Thistleclaw walked out of the warriors den with a scowl. "Bluefur. It looks like you brought the whole of RiverClan with you. Are you going to try and fight us by walking in our camp?" He taunted. "You just ruined the element of surprise, you know."

Bluefur's eyes narrowed. She wouldn't reply to his nonsense. "Fetch Sunstar," she hissed. "Now."

--

Inside Sunstar's den, Bluefur was dripping wet, her fur plastered to her body. She stared at the leader, desperation in her eyes. "Please let us stay," she rasped. "Our camp was completely flooded. Brambleberry died and-"

"Where is Hailstar?" Sunstar interrupted calmly, his tail tip twitching. "His deputy shouldn't be the one speaking for RiverClan."

Bluefur glared at him for a moment before replying. "He's dead," she replied flatly, her face betraying no emotion.

Sunstar blinked in surprise, and then he dipped his head. "I always expected you'd become a leader one day, Bluefur. But not like this," he sighed with sadness in his eyes.

Bluefur shrugged. "Well I am, and RiverClan needs your help. Please let us stay in your camp until the floods have gone down," she hissed, her eyes widening.

Sunstar's brows furrowed, and he hesitated before replying. "Okay. But your warriors must hunt and fight with us, and the second your camp is good enough to live in you can go back."

Bluefur nodded. "That sounds good-"

"And you will not get your nine lives until RiverClan has moved out," Sunstar finished. "Until you leave, you are part of ThunderClan."

Bluefur scowled, then reluctantly nodded. "Yes, Sunstar."

Quietly she padded out of the leader's den, looking at her cats and the cats of ThunderClan mingled with them. "RiverClan is allowed to stay," she announced. "If we fight and hunt with ThunderClan. The second our camp is fit to live in, we leave. And I can't get my lives until we leave."

Mossdapple's fur bushed out in panic. "What if you die?! We won't have a leader!"

Bluefur snorted in reply. "I won't die. I've survived this long," she purred. She turned to the deputy. "Sunstar also told me for you to include us in patrols," she meowed with a dip of her head.

Thistleclaw snarled. "I guessed that, thank you."

Bluefur decided not to be openly hostile to the ThunderClan deputy, even though she desperately wanted to claw his throat out. She nodded and padded off. Thistleclaw hissed, his long fur dripping wet from the rain. "Let's go inside our dens for now," the grey tom growled. "Which we would still be doing if *someone* didn't barge in."

Bluefur didn't react, only entering the Warriors' den. She lay down on a bit of earth since there was no moss left. "RiverClan, we'll get moss tomorrow for our nests," she meowed, folding her paws underneath her and closing her eyes.

When Bluefur woke up, she was in the dark forest staring at Mapleshade. The tortoiseshell she-cat was grinning. "I did it! I helped you become a leader!" The evil she-cat purred.

Bluefur snarled, crouching to leap at Mapleshade. She leapt and the she-cat disappeared, appearing again behind her. "You might've caught me off guard once," Mapleshade meowed. "But not again. You can keep on trying and trying to attack me, but it will never

work!"

Bluefur shook her head from side to side. "Leave me alone, foxheart! You killed him! You killed Hailstar!" She screeched, raising a paw to swipe at her. Mapleshade only smirked.

"To help you, of course, dearie," she purred, tail swishing against the grass. "Everything I do has been to help you, and see how it's helped!"

Bluefur shut her eyes tight as Mapleshade let out a cackle. She forced herself to fade away from the dark forest and into the real world.

--

Two sunrises later, Bluefur was assigned on a patrol with Whitestorm, Tigerclaw Thistleclaw and Darkstripe to look at the RiverClan camp. On the way, Bluefur felt extremely awkward, around four toms that seemed to either dislike or hate her. She closed her eyes and looked sideways at Thistleclaw. "Thistleclaw," she began slowly. "I'm the leader of RiverClan now, and you'll soon be the leader of ThunderClan, and I don't want bad blood between us anymore. I'd like an era of peace between ThunderClan and RiverClan when we're both leaders, so no blood is spilled for no good reason. Please, will you let that happen?"

Thistleclaw was silent. His gaze looked thoughtful, making Bluefur rather surprised. Was he going to say yes? He looked at her, and his eyes immediately filled with scorn and anger. "Why would I become allies with you?!" He spat, eyes wild. "You traitorous fox-heart, I'd rather die than be in an alliance with you. When I lead ThunderClan, I'll soon lead *all* the Clans."

Bluefur took a step back from the fury in Thistleclaw's eyes. "Of course," she meowed calmly. "That's your choice. But if ThunderClan is ever in need of help when you're Thistlestar, we will help if you'd like us to."

"ThunderClan asks for help from no Clan!" The deputy of ThunderClan snarled. He inhaled deeply and then sighed. "I think

you should go back to RiverClan, right now, or there will be consequences," he meowed coldly.

"But-"

"Right. Now."

Bluefur sighed. "The second we get back to camp we'll go home. Let's just check the camp first."

With a curt nod, Thistleclaw bounded forwards, his tail lashing. Bluefur followed with her eyes narrowed and a scowl on her face.

--

Bluefur walked into Sunstar's den, dipping her head as she entered. "Sunstar," she greeted.

"Bluefur," Sunstar replied simply, his eyes curious. "Is RiverClan camp fit to live in now?"

Bluefur hesitated. The camp was absolutely destroyed. But how could she say that, when Thistleclaw was threatening to do something to her if she didn't go. The RiverClan she-cat nodded, with a flick of her tail and a twitch of her ears.

"Yes, Sunstar. We're ready to go home now," she murmured.

Sunstar nodded. "I expect you'll be going to the moonstone soon then?" He suggested.

Bluefur nodded, turning and padding away. She gathered her warriors and the Clan left, back to their horribly destroyed camp. As they neared it, cats gasped at how ravaged it was. Bluefur sighed.

"We're home."

Chapter Twenty

"We're home," Bluefur sighed, walking to the middle of camp. The water reached up to her paws, but they'd have to deal with it. She gasped as she saw a body in the middle of the camp and almost vomited as she saw bits of the flesh torn off as if the crows had been eating them. Hailstar. And nearby was Brambleberry, looking the same.

"If you're squeamish, you must not help with burying Brambleberry or Hailstar. We will not sit vigil next to their bodies," Bluefur announced.

Petaldust gasped. "What?! But they were our leader and medicine cat!"

"The crows got to them first," Bluefur retorted. "Oakheart, could you get cats to bury them? Then organise who will rebuild the camp."

Her mate nodded, looking at her sadly. He turned and started ordering who would bury Hailstar and Brambleberry. Bluefur turned and padded off in the direction of the warriors' den, her eyes dull. She flinched as a paw prodded her side. "Mossdapple," Bluefur greeted.

Mossdapple dipped her head. "You don't sleep there anymore. We should get going, by the way," she purred.

Bluefur realised once more she was now leader of ThunderClan and would have to get her nine lives at the moonstone. She nodded to Mossdapple. "We're going together, I guess," she murmured. Then she rose her voice. "Mossdapple and I will be heading to the moonstone now. Oakheart will look after the camp while I am gone."

As the two left, Bluefur heard murmurs of her mate becoming her deputy and the trust she was putting into him.

-

The two she-cats travelled through RiverClan territory, not saying a word. After a while, Mossdapple looked sideways at Bluefur. "Bluefur," she murmured. "A few nights ago I had a vision."

Bluefur looked up, interested. "Yeah?"

Mossdapple's looked around nervously, then turned to Bluefur. "There was a fire, a horrible fire. Then I saw a strange white she-cat who looked like Whitestorm, and-"

Bluefur gasped. "Snowfur! She was my sister. How was she?"

Mossdapple smiled. "She's well, I think. But she said everything will only get worse from here on out," she meowed, anxiety showing in her eyes.

Bluefur rested her tail on her daughter's shoulder as they walked. "I'll make sure it doesn't, no matter what Snowfur says, alright?" She promised, speeding up her pace. Mossdapple trotted over, looking awkward.

"What was Snowfur like?" she murmured, looking at her paws.

Bluefur purred. "She was the bravest and the kindest. She made a bad choice in a mate though," she meowed wryly. When Mossdapple didn't reply, she sighed. "She loved Thistleclaw. I saw the evil in him and she didn't. We argued about it once, and she ran off, and-" Her voice cracked. "Ran right next to the thunderpath."

"Did she run onto it?" Mossdapple asked. "Because of an argument?"

Bluefur snorted. "Of course not. There were ShadowClan warriors stealing our prey and she chased them off. But they made it to the other side, and she didn't," She meowed simply, trying not to betray her emotion.

Mossdapple twined her tail with her mother's. "I'm so sorry."

"Yeah," Bluefur replied. "Guess it made Thistleclaw hate me even more. But when she was living, she was the best warrior you'd ever

meet. I loved her."

Mossdapple smiled warmly. "She sounded amazing. Does it help to talk about her?"

Bluefur had gotten used to the tight jaws of grief around her chest, but now they began to loosen. She'd never talked much about Snowfur after her death until now. "Yeah," she sighed. "It has, and she was."

The two didn't talk until they crossed the border and walked through WindClan territory.

"Oakheart saved you," Mossdapple observed with a twitch of her tail. "In the flood."

It had never truly occurred to Bluefur that the two might be making up until she thought about it. "Yeah. I think I want him to be my deputy."

Mossdapple's ear twitched. "Some cats might think of that as favouritism," she pointed out.

Bluefur shrugged. "And that matters how?" She retorted.

Mossdapple smiled. "I didn't mean it like that at all. Choose whoever you feel is right."

Bluefur didn't reply. She heard a voice in the distance. Easy to see, a black and white tom sprinted over to her, eyes wide with concern and yet hostility. "Bluefur, Mossdapple," he hissed as he drew closer. "What are you doing here?"

Bluefur dipped her head. "Talltail. We're going to the moonstone. Hailstar died a few sunrises ago in a flood. We've been sheltering in ThunderClan's camp."

Talltail nodded. "Tallstar," he corrected. "And I am sorry for RiverClan's loss. You'll be a good leader, Bluefur."

"Congratulations," Bluefur meowed with a smile. "We'll be on our way."

"Goodbye, and good luck," Tallstar meowed, watching them walk away.

Bluefur looked at Mossdapple in surprise. "Tallstar, huh?"

The medicine cat nodded. "I wonder how Heatherstar died?" She wondered.

Bluefur shrugged. "Maybe we'll hear at the gathering tomorrow?" She suggested, speeding up. They were almost there! She looked back at her daughter with shining eyes. "We're almost there, right?"

The medicine cat nodded with a purr. "Yeah, we are. Let's have something to eat and then go inside."

Bluefur nodded, walking off to catch a mouse or a fish. She began to feel anxious, getting distracted when trying to catch a blackbird and missing a squirrel. Would StarClan even accept her? What about after she was the leader? Would she be a good leader?

She walked back to Mossdapple, hungry and tired. "Didn't manage to catch anything," she sighed.

Mossdapple looked at her sympathetically. "This is a first for me too," she encouraged. "It'll be fine. Let's go!"

Bluefur followed Mossdapple into the dark cave, her whiskers brushing the sides of the tunnel as they walked. "It's dark," she whispered, her ears flattened.

Mossdapple giggled. "Not for long. It's so beautiful once the stone lights up!"

Bluefur abruptly stopped as Mossdapple did. She looked up and saw faint light and the moon. She watched as the moon moved and the light of it lit up the cave brightly, the light making her shut her eyes. When she opened them again she saw the beautiful moonstone, lit up by moonlight and shining. She closed her eyes shut, and touched her nose to the moonstone, ready to become Bluestar, leader of RiverClan.

Chapter Twenty One

"Bluefur, welcome to StarClan."

Bluefur woke up in the great fields of StarClan, in front of Snowfur, and eight other cats next to her. She stepped back into the line of cats with a smile. Bluefur felt like her heart was going to burst from happiness. "You're all here," she choked out.

The first cat stepped forwards, and Bluefur purred as she saw it was Pinestar. "You made it to StarClan!"

Pinestar nodded. "With this life, I give you compassion," he meowed, "to care for your clanmates."

The former leader touched his nose to Bluefur's forehead, making her sink her claws into the ground and spaz out in pain. She wanted to collapse and lie down, but couldn't. Next was the light brown pelt of Thrushpelt. He stared at her, pride in his eyes.

"With this life," the warrior meowed, "I give you endurance, to make it through any hardships your Clan has to face."

Once again Bluefur was hit with sudden horrible pain that stabbed through her body, making her jaws open in a soundless yowl, her eyes wide in panic. After she had recovered, she glimpsed Thrushpelt vanishing and next to him Crookedjaw appearing. "With this life, I give you hope. Even when your Clan is despairing, there is always hope."

At this life, Bluefur still felt in extreme pain but also felt a growing hope and excitement in her chest, making her ready for the next lives. She dipped her head to the former deputy. "I hope I can follow in your pawsteps," she rasped, smiling determinedly at the tom with the crooked jaw.

Crookedjaw dipped his head. "I'm sure you will," he murmured as he disappeared.

Next was Sweetpaw, an apprentice of ThunderClan who died before Bluefur became a warrior. Bluefur smiled warmly. "Sweetpaw, you're here," she purred.

"With this life, I give you humour. If your Clanmates are despondent, then you can lighten the mood!"

Bluefur made it through the pain of the life, feeling bubbly and lighthearted. She grinned. "Thank you, Sweetpaw."

Next was Brambleberry, walking up with none of the horrible scars and rotting flesh she had in death.

"I give you the life of courage. No matter what happens, keep your head high and be optimistic. Stay strong when you're about to go in a battle."

After the pain, Bluefur felt like leaping into a battle and fighting. She stumbled to her paws and stared at the next cat to come forward was Rosetail, who had died in the flood. Bluefur leapt forward and nuzzled her friend. "I've missed you!"

"I give you a life of patience. If you wait then everything will come to you soon!" The ginger she-cat purred back.

After Rosetail stepped back, Hailstar stepped forward, making Bluefur purr in happiness. "Hailstar, I'm so happy you're here!" She meowed.

Hailstar dipped his head. "You've been such a great deputy, and I trust you'll be a great leader too," the leader purred.

Bluefur grinned. "Thank you so much."

Hailstar nodded solemnly. "I give you a life for trust. Trust in your warriors and they will trust in you in return," the leader meowed.

Bluefur closed her eyes. Even if she was ready for the pain, it still stabbed into her and made her stumble. When she looked up, the tom was gone and in his place was Moonflower. Bluefur's eyes glistened with grief. "Moonflower," she whispered.

Moonflower's gaze was guarded, and she looked uncomfortable, but she gave Bluefur her eighth life anyways.

"I give you a life for pride," she meowed. "Be proud of where you live and your Clanmates. It will help you in the long run."

Bluefur felt less pain at Moonflower's life as if it wasn't meant too much, but she still felt the life flooding through her. She purred at her mother, but she was already gone. She frowned.

Then Snowfur padded back to her, eyes shining. "I'm sorry about Moonflower. She's still hurt you left ThunderClan," her sister meowed softly with a smile.

Bluefur hissed. "Well she should accept it," she growled. Then her voice softened. "I've missed you so much."

Snowfur purred. "I've missed you too, Bluefur. You've grown so much and I'm so, so happy you're going to be the leader of RiverClan! You can destroy Thistleclaw, and all of StarClan- well, most of StarClan- are rooting you on, and we believe in you! With this life, I give you love. Whether it be romantic or platonic, love is the strongest weapon. And Thistleclaw has none. That's why I believe in you to destroy him."

Bluefur purred. "I love you, Snowfur," she whispered as her sister leaned forward. She felt a rush of affection and pain, strength to look after her whole Clan with one paw, love and strength to destroy Thistleclaw and make sure he never took over the four Clans of the forest.

She stared at Snowfur, all the love she had ever felt for her sister in her eyes. Snowfur stared back with Bluefur's love reflected in her gaze. Then she dipped her head. "Good luck, Bluefur," she murmured. When she looked up, her eyes were excited and happy.

"Or should I say Bluestar?"

Bluestar raised her chin and listened to the chants of StarClan. Their cheers echoing in the fields, full of happiness and pride.

"Bluestar! Bluestar!"

From now on, she wouldn't be Bluefur anymore but Bluestar, leader of RiverClan and the cat who would stop Thistleclaw.

Then she paused. Moonflower sat on her own. The new leader walked over to her once the other cats faded away. She sat next to her mother. "I know you are ashamed of me," she meowed calmly. "But this is what I want. I'll make you proud."

Moonflower looked up in surprise. "You've already made me proud. You're my daughter and leader of a Clan. It's just... why not ThunderClan? This could've turned out so much better in ThunderClan if you had just not been with Oakheart."

Bluestar sighed. "Oakheart is the best thing that's ever happened with me."

She gave her mother a quick nuzzle on the cheek and then turned to the light swallowing everything whole. She closed her eyes, letting it take her.

She woke up next to the moonstone, turning to Mossdapple. "StarClan gave me my nine lives," she meowed, relieved.

Mossdapple purred. "Did you really think they wouldn't?"

The two padded out of the tunnel and to Bluestar's new life as a leader.

Chapter Twenty Two

Bluestar padded into camp with Mossdapple behind her. The leader looked around at the Clan- at her Clan, purring. "StarClan has given me my nine lives and my name as a leader, and I am now Bluestar!" She announced, her tail waving in the air.

The cats of RiverClan cheered her name and Bluestar closed her eyes, basking in the praise. Then she got up and leapt onto the highrock. "RiverClan, gather!" She yowled.

After RiverClan gathered, she began her first ceremony. "I have thought long and hard about my decision of Deputy. I say these words under the cats of StarClan, hoping they will guide this Deputy's paws and approve of my choice. Oakheart, will you stand beside me as my new Deputy?"

Oakheart inhaled sharply, then shook his head. "No, Bluefu-star. I cannot accept this. I have been grieving and I have been a bad Clanmate lately. I don't deserve this place. I am honoured you thought I have been worthy of the title, though."

Bluestar recoiled, surprised. "I-of course. Then, the new deputy will be Stonefur."

Cats murmured among themselves about the leader choosing her mate and then her son. Bluestar hissed. "Be quiet. I haven't chosen these cats because they are my kin, but because I think they are fit to be a leader!"

The cats immediately silenced and stared at Bluestar with apologetic eyes. Bluestar flicked her tail. "Stonefur, do you accept this position?" She asked with a wry smile.

Stonefur nodded immediately. "Yes, Bluestar. I am honoured."

Bluestar dipped her head. "Then the new deputy of RiverClan will be Stonefur!"

"Stonefur! Stonefur!" The Clan chanted. Stonefur dipped his head modestly, his chest puffed out. "Thank you. I will make sure I am a deputy RiverClan is proud of!"

Bluestar purred, leaping off of the highrock. "That marks the end of this meeting!"

Mistyfoot and Mossdapple raced over to Stonefur, giving him licks and congratulations. Bluestar watched with her tail high. "The gathering is tonight, don't forget!" She called out. "Stonefur, you can come into my den and help me with who goes after sorting the patrols."

Stonefur nodded curtly. "Yes, Bluestar. Now, Whiteclaw will you lead the patrol with..."

The deputy's words faded into the distance as Bluestar walked over to Mossdapple, who had walked away and was grooming herself in a corner of the camp. "Is everyone okay?" Bluestar asked. "While we were gone, I mean."

Mossdapple chuckled. "Everyone's fine," she reported jokingly. "Don't worry, Bluestar."

Bluestar shuffled her paws. "Right. Sorry," she muttered. "I was just checking."

Mossdapple smiled warmly. "Don't act embarrassed! You don't need to. You're our leader."

Bluestar chuckled nervously. "I guess."

Mossdapple began to groom herself again. "So what are you going to say at the gathering?" She asked with a twinkle in her eyes.

The leader hesitated. "That there was a flood in RiverClan, that Hailstar and Brambleberry died, and that we thank ThunderClan for their hospitality? Oh- and that Stonefur is the deputy!"

Mossdapple purred. "Don't doubt yourself, Bluestar. You're doing perfectly," she murmured, lying down and looking up at her leader with kind eyes.

Bluestar sighed, exasperated. "How did you become so wise? I remember when you were a tiny kit in the nursery!"

"Elder," the medicine cat teased.

"I grew up, Bluestar," Mossdapple answered more seriously after a second. "So did Mistyfoot and Stonefur. We may be your kits, but we have fully grown now."

Slightly hurt, Bluestar dipped her head and walked over to Stonefur, who had finished ordering patrols. "How's being a deputy?" She asked.

Mistyfoot, who was sitting next to the tom, replied for him. "He's loving it," she replied dryly.

Bluestar's eyebrows furrowed. "If you don't want to be deputy, it's okay-"

Stonefur glared at Mistyfoot, then turned to smile at Bluestar. "I really enjoy it, even if I haven't been doing it much so far! Organising patrols is hard. I keep on worrying I'll put a cat on two different patrols!"

Bluestar purred, relaxing. "Are you finished?" She asked.

Stonefur nodded. "Yeah, let's go," he meowed, heading off for the leader's den.

Of course! Bluestar thought. *I live in the leader's den now!*

She followed after Stonefur, entering the den after him. "Right. Let's discuss who will go."

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Bluestar finished telling the cats who would go to the gathering and leapt off the highrock. "Let's get going! We don't want to be late," she purred, beginning to lead the way with Stonefur close behind.

As they neared the gathering hollow, Bluestar looked at Stonefur. "I'm sorry if I've been too protective of a mother," she meowed

quickly. "Mossdapple told me earlier you were full grown now, and-"

Stonefur snorted. "Don't listen to a word my sisters say. Both of their brains are full of fluff! Mossdapple's acting all wise, I bet. All three of us love you very much, mum."

Bluestar felt a bit better after that, smiling at the grey tom. "You've grown into such a fine tom," she murmured, half to herself.

Stonefur purred. "Thank you!"

Bluestar looked forwards. The gathering was about to start. She remembered when Hailstar flicked his tail and the cats would go streaming down into the hollow. She remembered the smart words and calm phrases he used and how he always stayed calm if there was a fight.

StarClan, I miss Hailstar, she thought sadly. *If I'm at least half the leader he is, I'd be honoured.*

She slowed down, listening to her warriors' paw steps. She thought about the dream she had so many moons ago, with Snowfur and that alternate universe. She was glad she was here and not in a universe without Stonefur, Mistyfoot or Mossdapple. After she defeated Thistleclaw, she would be finally at peace and have a peaceful reign as leader. She closed her eyes for a second. Who was the ginger cat who consoled her, and would he still have a part to play?

Dread filled her stomach. She had to get to him before Thistleclaw did. She knew he would turn the ginger tom into a murderer and a traitor with his wicked ways.

She shook her head. *I need to concentrate on here and now,* she thought, looking down into the hollow. She inhaled deeply, and let out a breath.

Then she flicked her tail, and her warriors raced into the gathering area.

Chapter Twenty Three

Bluestar walked into the hollow with pricked ears. She almost sat down with the deputies but realised she was now a leader and had to sit with the others. "Hello, Tallstar," she greeted the WindClan leader with a dip of her head. Tallstar nodded in return. "How was the ceremony?" He asked.

Bluestar smiled. "It was fine, thank you. Should we, uh, start soon?"

Raggedstar of ShadowClan scowled. "We'll start when Sunstar arrives."

Bluestar ducked her head. "Of course," she muttered.

As if the ShadowClan leader's words summoned ThunderClan, they started to pour into the gathering place, Sunstar in the lead. He leapt up mightily onto the large stone, dipping his head to Bluestar. "Bluefur."

Bluestar gave the ThunderClan cat a nod, her tail tip twitching.

"Shall we start?" Raggedstar growled, raking at the ground with his claws.

Sunstar raised his head and let out a yowl. "Let the gathering begin!"

Bluestar was suddenly filled with anxiety as Tallstar stepped forward.

"WindClan has been good," he reported. "We have healthy prey and no intruders. I, Tallstar, am the new Leader of WindClan and Deadfoot is my deputy, as Heatherstar died peacefully in the night a few sunrises after last moon's gathering."

"Tallstar! Deadfoot! Tallstar! Deadfoot!" The clan's cheered, their yowls echoing around.

Bluestar looked down from the great rock nervously, seeing Thistleclaw. He met her eye with a grin. Unnerved, Bluestar looked away. She was aware of Spottedleaf's stare gazing at her sharply. Next, Raggedstar stepped forward.

"My new deputy is Brokentail, as Cloudpelt died," he meowed simply, eyes shining with pride. A tabby tom that looked exactly like the leader dipped his head and smiled. Bluestar's eyes widened. His smile seemed charming, yes, but also very misleading and maybe even evil. Raggedstar stepped back, eyes narrowed.

Next, Sunstar stepped forward. "ThunderClan have been doing well! Willowpelt has had a new litter, which is Whitestorm's!"

Cats purred in happiness and pride. Kits were something that all the cats loved. Sunstar dipped his head, smiling. "In the flood, Rosetail died and we miss her very much. But we are sure she is happy hunting with StarClan."

Murmurs of sympathy were directed at the sky, where Rosetail now lived. Sunstar hung his head. "That is all," he meowed solemnly, stepping back and turning his head to Bluestar.

Bluestar realised after a moment that all eyes were on her. She opened her mouth but no words would come out. Shakily, she took a step forward, looking nervous. Her gaze scanned the crowd. Why couldn't she be like Tallstar, able to speak in front of a crowd so easily? She inhaled, then began to speak, relaxing once she started.

"RiverClan was damaged in the flood, but we are fine now. Our medicine cat, Brambleberry, died and left Mossdapple in her place."

"Mossdapple! Mossdapple!" The clans cheered loudly. Bluestar smiled. Mossdapple must be popular in the Clans! She hoped they'd greet her with her new rank like that.

"Hailstar also died saving Reedkit from drowning. He was a hero and died like one. He lives in StarClan with his friends and family now. We thank ThunderClan for their hospitality, as we stayed in their camp while the flood died down. I am now Bluestar," the leader finished nervously, hoping the cats would accept her.

Before any chanting started, Thistleclaw stood up, snarling. "Are we really going to let a traitor become a leader of a Clan?!" He spat. "Let's not forget she left her birth Clan! Why is StarClan giving her the gift of nine lives when she might leave her new Clan?!"

Bluestar felt like jumping down and raking Thistleclaw's ears off, but she stayed calm. "Thistleclaw, I have been in RiverClan for many seasons and have earned my place as Leader. I have raised kits and mentored an apprentice. I have proved my loyalty to RiverClan many times in battle, and you do not have a place to criticise my place as leader. Let's not forget," she meowed icily. "Doesn't it say in the warrior code not to kill in battle if not needed? Does that not make you a traitor too?"

Thistleclaw's eyes widened in rage and his fur puffed out. "I was defending my Clan!" He yowled. "You're more of a traitor than me, going off and having kits with Oakheart and saying they were Thrushpelt's!"

The clearing went silent. No cat dared to speak. Bluestar was taken aback. She opened her jaws to say something, but no words came out. "I-" she choked out.

Spottedleaf got to her paws, her eyes shimmering. Bluestar relaxed. Surely the medicine cat would defend her?

Alas, the ThunderClan she-cat's words were laced with anger. "Why should we let this cat become the leader of RiverClan?" she mewed coldly. "She and her kits should be driven out, I say."

Bluestar looked up to the sky and was relieved when she saw clouds covering the moon from sight. "The gathering is over!" She yowled, leaping off of the rock and beckoning for her cats to follow her. She ignored the hisses and snarls aimed at her and her kits as she stalked off.

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Bluestar arrived back in camp, walking right into camp and flopping in her nest. She buried her head in her paws and began to tremble. She barely noticed Oakheart coming in and lying down

next to her, twining his tail with her's. "I'm sorry about being so horrible before," he murmured. "I love you."

Bluestar sighed. "They'll all hate me. My kits and all the Clans. What if I *am* driven out?!"

Oakheart pressed closer to her, claws unsheathing into the moss. "You won't be driven out," he growled through gritted teeth. "I'll make sure of it."

Bluestar couldn't feel relieved that Oakheart would do that. What if she got another cat killed? Or he was driven out anyways?

As the blue-grey leader sunk into sleep, she couldn't help being terrified of the days to come. What would happen to her and the cats closest to her? Had Thistleclaw finally found a way to get rid of her once and for all?

Bluestar began to bristle. Would she, in the end, turn out like Mapleshade?

Bluestar's thoughts wouldn't stop, even in her sleep, as she dreamt.

Chapter Twenty Four

Bluestar woke up the next morning still feeling miserable.

She padded slowly and guiltily out of camp, watching the cats go about their ordinary business. Would their routines be ruined by her and her horrible secret?

She shook her head, tail lashing. Not everything would be ruined. Maybe nothing would happen at all. She inhaled deeply and walked closer. "Good morning," she purred shakily.

Cats dipped their heads and looked at her sympathetically, making her feel worse. She shook out her fur and looked at her clanmates determinedly. "Where's Stonefur?" She asked calmly.

Mistyfoot stepped forwards, her ears twitching. "He's out on a patrol," she reported with a smile. "He'll be back soon, though."

Bluestar nodded curtly. "Thanks, Mistyfoot," she meowed, turning and trotting out of the camp.

--

Bluestar found herself wandering towards the sunningrocks. She swam across the river, which was still rather swollen, but made it to the other side. She sat down on the rocks, grooming herself.

"Hey!" A voice yowled, making Bluestar jump and unsheathe her claws.

Bluestar saw Whitestorm stalking over to her. "Hey, traitor. What're you doing on ThunderClan territory?"

Bluestar hissed. "This is RiverClan territory and rightfully so. I'd suggest you don't cross our borders."

"I would've thought you were fine with crossing borders," the white tom sneered. "Since you went over ThunderClan's to meet

Oakheart."

Bluestar tried her best not to bristle and lunge at her nephew. "Whitestorm, I... I'm sorry. For leaving, for being with Oakheart."

Whitestorm snorted. "Save it, traitor! I don't need you anymore. I have Thistleclaw and Tigerclaw. I have kits! I don't need an aunt who left me for RiverClan!"

Bluestar flinched. "How is Willowpelt?" She asked softly, sinking back when he glared at her.

"Why do you care?!" He yowled, tail bushing up. "I'm fine with my father."

Bluestar sighed. "I'll leave, Whitestorm. But remember that this is RiverClan territory. We have scent marks here, and they aren't moving any time soon."

As the leader stalked off, she heard Whitestorm call after her. "This is so much more than borders!"

--

Bluestar walked back to camp, fuming. She padded over to Stonefur, who was sharing tongues with Mistyfoot. As she entered the camp, he sat up and dipped his head to her. "Bluestar. Mistyfoot told me that you were looking for me? Is there something you need?" He asked cautiously.

Bluestar calmed down, then nodded. "Would you like to go on a walk with me? I need to talk to you."

"Yes, Bluestar," the grey tom replied, following her back out of camp.

As the two walked, Bluestar thought about what to say. She opened her mouth, but Stonefur talked first.

"About the gathering," he meowed, tail tip twitching. "What will you do?"

Bluestar's mouth went dry. "I was going to ask you," she muttered. "What do you think I should do?"

Stonefur's ear twitched. "It depends. If I were you, I wouldn't respond and let it all blow over. But I'm not you. So what do you think is the best way of getting this rumour to stop?"

Bluestar's ears pricked up in surprise. "You think it'd just blow over?"

"Of course. Drama does eventually, doesn't it?" Stonefur meowed nonchalantly.

"You aren't worried about it at all?" Bluestar asked in surprise. "But you're my kit!"

"And? It doesn't help to get all involved in the rumours," Stonefur replied.

Bluestar didn't answer, thinking about how Stonefur was right and it would blow over, but she couldn't truly believe that. What if it went on forever and everyone thought she was a traitor and shouldn't be a leader? She deliberately didn't look at Stonefur, looking at the river now in front of them.

"It's a lot less flooded," she commented, hoping to change the subject from the night before.

Stonefur glanced at her with a concerned expression but didn't start up the conversation again. "Yes, it is."

Bluestar stared into the distance for a few seconds, before sighing. "I'm sorry."

Stonefur didn't react. "What for?"

"For leaving ThunderClan. For being with Oakheart," Bluestar whispered.

"Don't be sorry. I wouldn't be the cat I am now if I wasn't born or if we were raised in ThunderClan. I might've ended up like Tigerclaw," Stonefur answered briskly. "You really don't need to

worry about it."

Bluestar smiled sadly. "Thank you, Stonefur," she purred. "I'm so glad you didn't end up like Tigerclaw or... Whitestorm."

Her son tipped his head to one side. "Was Whitestorm always so... violent? He seems troubled," he murmured thoughtfully.

Bluestar hung her head. "He used to be such a thoughtful and kind apprentice. A lot like you, actually. You could've been good friends."

Stonefur shook out his fur. "I couldn't imagine him being kind," he snorted, lapping at the river. When he looked back up at Bluestar, there was a glimmer of amusement in his icy blue eyes.

Bluestar smiled wryly. "Me neither. Thistleclaw must've-" She broke off, squinting as she stared across the river into ThunderClan territory. On the other side, a dark grey tom was talking to a brown tom and a white tom. She scowled. "Speak of the devil."

She flinched as for a split second a fire was swallowing the cats and the forest whole. She shook her head of the vision. "What are they talking about?"

Faintly, she could hear what the cats were saying. She listened intently to the conversation.

"Then we'll get rid of that piece of foxdung! I'll be Thistlestar, and finally, Bluestar will get her revenge for being such a traitor," Thistleclaw snarled, digging his claws into the grass. "The visions have been stronger," the tom continued, looking at Tigerclaw. "Fire destroying the forest, and ThunderClan's leader."

Tigerclaw let out a laugh. "And then you'll be one step closer to your goal!"

Whitestorm said nothing, looking away from the two and into the forest. "I saw a kittypet the other day."

Thistleclaw scowled. "And? Kittypets are weak and stupid!"

Whitestorm shook his head. "No. When I looked at him I realised he could have so much potential. He had a ginger coat, which looked like fire in the sun. Do you think he has something to do with your vision?"

Thistleclaw grinned. "Do you think he'd be a good fighter?"

The white tom nodded. "We should recruit him."

Bluestar took a step back, feeling sick. The ginger cat was the cat she saw in her dreams! What was Thistleclaw going to do to him, Sunstar and all of ThunderClan?

Chapter Twenty Five

Bluestar could hardly look at Stonefur before Thistleclaw turned and saw the leader and her deputy. A twisted grin appeared on his face, and he nimbly leapt over the stepping stones, with the two warriors following. He crossed the border and brought his face up to Bluestar, their muzzles so close they were almost touching. She recoiled as the tom exhaled, his breath smelling of blood. "What did you hear?" He whispered, moving so he was talking right into her ear. "Whatever it was, I really hope you don't tell anyone."

Bluestar stared at the two warriors, eyes wide. "I didn't."

"Good," Thistleclaw meowed softly. "If you did, there would have been an accident."

Bluestar took a step back as she heard the tom's claws unsheathe. "Get off of RiverClan territory," she meowed calmly, letting her claws out of their sheaths in reply.

Thistleclaw smirked. "Why should we, traitor?"

Bluestar didn't reply to the word, tail lashing. She watched her nephew, glaring at her with fury in his eyes as he stood on one of the stepping stones. Her eyes widened, and she opened her jaws. "Get off!" She yowled. But she was too late.

The warrior's paws slipped and he went with a large splash into the river. Everything seemed to go in slow motion. Stonefur jumping to help the tom, Whitestorm's terrified expression as he fell, Thistleclaw's anger being replaced by horror and Tigerclaw screaming Whitestorm's name.

Bluestar pushed Stonefur over, glaring down at him. "I can't lose you too," she hissed. Then she jumped into the river, paws churning in the water.

Whitestorm had already given up and gone underwater, the leader

realised. She dived under and went limp, letting the current sweep her closer to her nephew. She moved her paws again to feel fur. She pushed forwards and grabbed Whitestorm's scruff, attempting to pull him to the surface. *It won't work!* She realised with a lurch.

Quickly she got a breath of air and went back under, pulling hard to get Whitestorm to the bank. She didn't relax even when she found her paws on the ground. She prodded Whitestorm desperately. "Swim!" She yowled from above the waves, beginning to lose strength. Whitestorm's amber eye blinked open just as Bluestar slipped and found no strength to paddle once more. He scrambled for a grip with his hind legs, and then pushed up, bringing the leader with him. It didn't work and he went back under. Bluestar grabbed his scruff once more and kicked to the edge of the water, horrified as she saw Whitestorm's eyes close. She took another breath and worked her hardest.

She was just about to give up when she felt the dirt of the bank, out of the water. She dragged Whitestorm over and managed, only just, to pull herself out of the river. Whitestorm flopped next to her, eyes closed and chest barely moving. She nudged him at first and then prodded. The prodding turned into desperate pushing for the tom to move. At last, Whitestorm's brilliant amber eyes opened. They flared with hostility when he saw Bluestar, but he had no strength to pull himself to his paws. He lay there, staring at her with undisguised hate and unable to move. Bluestar lay down next to him, burying her muzzle into his neck fur. "I thought you died," she whispered.

Whitestorm recoiled, an excuse for a hiss exiting his mouth. "Get... away... from me," he rasped. "I didn't need your help."

Bluestar stared at him disbelievingly for a second. She managed to get to her paws and sit up, turning to see Stonefur sprinting over to her. "I thought you two were dead!" He cried, his calm demeanour evaporating.

Bluestar purred weakly. "Well, I didn't. Neither did he, thanks to me," she grumbled, motioning with her head to Whitestorm.

Behind Stonefur, Tigerclaw and Thistleclaw approached cautiously.

"Will he be alright?" Tigerclaw whimpered, silenced by Thistleclaw's glare. "Of course he will be!" The deputy snarled, the smallest hint of worry and anxiety in his tone and eyes.

Whitestorm made it to his paws, still glaring at Bluestar. "I'm fine, dad," he muttered, limping over. He shook the water from his fur, his gaze now emotionless. "We better get off of ThunderClan territory."

Bluestar dipped her head to Thistleclaw. "Next time, don't try to invade RiverClan territory."

Stonefur's whiskers twitched in amusement. "And don't fall into the river again."

Whitestorm scowled. "I didn't mean to!" He snarled.

Thistleclaw snarled at his son. "Yes, Bluestar. I'm sorry for my son," he meowed through gritted teeth. It was obvious that he was desperately holding onto his temper. Bluestar nodded. "Would you like me to escort you off of your territory?"

Thistleclaw's tail lashed. "No, we're fine," he hissed.

Bluestar dipped her head. "We will make sure you leave our territory though."

The ThunderClan cats turned to leave and Tigerclaw looked back at Bluestar. "Thank you for saving Whitestorm," he murmured gruffly, turning and following the others.

Bluestar nodded in reply, watching the three cats jump over the stepping stones. She stepped forward to help when Whitestorm stumbled, but Tigerclaw stopped to help him cross the stones and cross over into ThunderClan territory. She watched her nephew, his father and his friend sadly. Maybe there was a different universe where Bluestar-no, Bluefur got on with Thistleclaw, and he didn't turn out so horrible. Maybe Whitestorm and Tigerclaw would be kind, and ThunderClan would be in safe paws with Thistleclaw as deputy. Maybe ThunderClan would love and cherish Mossdapple, Stonefur and Mistyfoot.

She closed her eyes. Maybe Snowfur would still be alive? She looked over at her son, still thinking about a world where everything turned out perfect. There would be peace in all the clans.

She shook her head as Stonefur padded away with a relieved expression on his face. That universe would never be her's. She had to live with this one, and become the best cat she could be. Maybe after the Clans were rid of Thistleclaw there would be peace? Tigerclaw and Whitestorm didn't seem totally on board with the grey tom's ambitions. Maybe she could convince them to not be on the same side as Thistleclaw.

Feeling a little more hopeful, Bluestar sighed and followed her son into the depths of RiverClan's territory.

Chapter Twenty Six

"Bluestar?"

Bluestar's eyes opened. She found herself in a starry meadow, looking at her mother. Moonflower stared back blankly. "Hello, Bluestar."

Bluestar dipped her head to her mother. "Moonflower," she murmured. "Why did you summon me here?"

"If you don't want Thistleclaw to rise to power," Moonflower mewed. "You are going to have to do it now. I see a path of fire and destruction for ThunderClan if you don't destroy him!"

"And for RiverClan?" Bluestar retorted. "If Thistleclaw isn't going to hurt my Clan, I won't kill ThunderClan's deputy and start a war."

Moonflower scowled, tail lashing. "All the Clans will be destroyed if he isn't stopped."

Bluestar bared her teeth, beginning to lose her patience. "You cats in StarClan are sending me mixed signals," she growled. "Snowfur tells me not to kill Thistleclaw when I want to, and you tell me to kill him when I don't want to!"

Moonflower looked faintly embarrassed. "Yes, well, we all agree now that you need to get rid of him."

Bluestar's tail lashed. "How will I do that, even if I wanted to? He's never alone," she hissed, stepping forwards and staring right at Moonflower.

Moonflower couldn't meet the leader's gaze. She turned away and sighed. "If you find him alone, please, Bluestar. We need you."

Bluestar gasped as from both sides of Moonflower Crookedjaw and Thrushpelt appeared. Crookedjaw looked displeased, and Thrushpelt looked anxious.

"Please, Bluestar. We were murdered unjustly and we need him to be killed so that the Clans will be safe. The fire draws near," Thrushpelt murmured.

Bluestar began to bristle. "The fire?!"

Crookedjaw nodded curtly. "Yes. The fire will swallow up ThunderClan, but they will come out on top," he growled, his eyes grim.

Bluestar took a step back, the cats in front of her started to fade. Their gazes turned desperate and pleading, and before Bluestar knew it, they were all gone.

--

"Tigerclaw!"

Tigerclaw was prodded awake by Whitestorm, who was staring down at him with narrowed amber eyes.

"You gonna get up?" He purred with amusement in his gaze. "Or just sleep in all day, you badger?"

Tigerclaw gasped mockingly, jumping to his paws and swiping playfully at the white tom. "If I'm a badger, I'll kill you!"

"I can outrun a lumbering old badger!" Whitestorm replied, sprinting off and out of the Warriors' den. Tigerclaw jokingly stomped after him, following him outside.

He bumped into his friend as Whitestorm skidded to a halt. "Oh. Hey, dad," the white tom murmured.

Thistleclaw was staring down at him with fury in his eyes. "What were you doing? You're not kits, you know."

Tigerclaw padded beside his friend, pressing against him. "Sorry, Thistleclaw. We won't do it again," he apologised.

Thistleclaw scowled. "I hope so. Both of you, go hunting and bring back prey. Don't come back until you've caught something each."

Whitestorm dipped his head, ashamed. "Okay, dad."

Tigerclaw followed Whitestorm as they padded shamefully out of camp.

--

In the forest, Tigerclaw looked sideways at Whitestorm. "What a badger, am I right?" He murmured mischievously.

Whitestorm's ears pricked up and he frowned at Tigerclaw. "My dad isn't a badger."

Tigerclaw didn't reply, his tail flicking. "Do you agree with him?"

"What?"

Tigerclaw opened his jaws to scent the air, then looked back at Whitestorm. "Him, becoming the leader of the four Clans. Do you agree with that?"

Whitestorm turned back to the forest, sitting down and staring into the depths. "He's my father. I'm being loyal to him."

Tigerclaw's whiskers twitched. "So you don't agree," he meowed. "Me neither."

Whitestorm's eyes flashed with surprise. "But you seem to agree with what he says all the time!"

Tigerclaw shrugged nonchalantly. "I seem to, but I don't want him to be the leader of ThunderClan. It'll be trouble for everyone."

When Whitestorm didn't reply, Tigerclaw looked at him with concern in his eyes. "Nothing against you, I just-"

Whitestorm abruptly got to his paws and stalked off into the bushes. "I'm going hunting," he growled.

"Wait!" Tigerclaw called, chasing after Whitestorm. "Please, I didn't mean it like that, don't tell Thistleclaw-" He broke off as he heard his tone.

Whitestorm looked back, his gaze softening. "I won't. But he's my father. You have to realise that."

Tigerclaw looked at his paws mutinously. "I don't know what having a father is like," he hissed. "Don't expect me to realise."

Whitestorm buried his muzzle into Tigerclaw's almost-mane. "I'm sorry Pinestar left you," he murmured. Then he drew back.

"Let's go hunt," he mewed briskly.

--

Whitestorm and Tigerclaw padded back to camp with jaws full of prey. Cats congratulated them as they dropped their prey on the pile, and Tigerclaw puffed his chest out in pride.

Thistleclaw padded over to the two, nodding approvingly. "Good job, Whitestorm," he purred, his tail stroking his son's back.

Tigerclaw shrunk back, and Whitestorm looked at his father in confusion. "Tigerclaw caught just as much prey as me, if not more."

Thistleclaw drew his tail back and nodded. "Of course," he grunted. "How about you two eat with me today?"

"I'm fine, thanks," Whitestorm replied, shooting a smile at his father. "I'm not very hungry."

Thistleclaw's eyes narrowed. "Very well then," he growled, turning and padding away.

Whitestorm sat down next to Tigerclaw, giving him an apologetic glance. "Sorry about him," he murmured.

Tigerclaw looked at his paws, thoughts flooding through his head. Then he looked back up at Whitestorm. "What about a rebellion?" He suggested.

"What?!" Whitestorm whisper-yelled, recoiling and staring at him with a shocked gaze.

Tigerclaw licked a paw. "Thistleclaw wants to take over the Clans, which will be good for nobody. So we need to stop him."

Whitestorm scowled. "You know I'm very proud of Thistleclaw becoming deputy, and you know about his plan to become a leader soon!"

Tigerclaw dropped his voice to a murmur. "He's a dangerous cat," he muttered. "What if he asks us to kill or injure someone?"

Whitestorm's gaze hardened. "This is treasonous, Tigerclaw. If he asked us to do something as a leader, we'd have to obey. It's part of the warrior code."

Tigerclaw sighed. "I know, I'm just scared."

Whitestorm pressed against Tigerclaw. "What about?" He asked.

"The future of the Clans," Tigerclaw replied, eyes glazing over and staring at something in the far distance. "What will happen when Thistleclaw wreaks havock on all four of them, leaving scars that last forever."

Chapter Twenty Seven

Contrary to the days before, the sun was scorching hot and the rivers were drying up. Green-leaf had started.

Bluestar watched the clouds, desperately hoping one would pass over the sun, even for a second. She scowled as there were none nearby the blazing ball.

She looked back down as Oakheart padded over to her, looking miserable. She looked at him sympathetically, nuzzling his cheek. "Having long fur must be hard in these moons," she murmured, drawing back to stare at her mate.

Oakheart's gaze was serious. "The river is drying up. There's hardly any water," he reported. "We're worried a fire will start."

Bluestar's eyes widened. "A fire?"

Oakheart nodded gravely. "In ThunderClan territory, I'd guess. Nothing to worry about."

The brown tom's words faded away as Bluestar stopped focusing. A fire in ThunderClan territory?

The fire will swallow ThunderClan, but they will come out on top.

Crookedjaw's words echoed in her mind, making her feel queasy. Her back fur began to bristle. Oakheart seemed to notice her anxiety, pressing against her. "There's nothing to worry about," he repeated firmly, giving her a lick on the cheek.

Bluestar watched him walk away, barely able to focus. The world around her began to blur. She shook her head and stumbled into the medicine den. "Mossdapple," she rasped. "I need water. So... hot..."

She closed her eyes as the fresh feeling of water trickled down her

head, some ending up in her mouth. She weakly purred. "Thank you," she whispered.

Mossdapple propped her head up on more moss, looking at her worriedly. "Everything alright?"

Bluestar shook her head. "Oakheart said there'd be a fire in ThunderClan."

Mossdapple's eyes flashed with anxiety. "You think it's the one Crookedjaw told you about?"

Bluestar nodded warily. "I do."

The medicine cat's tail stroked the leader's back. "I'm sure it's metaphorical," She meowed briskly, tail swishing dismissively. Bluestar couldn't bring herself to agree with her daughter.

"It sounded like it was a real fire," she meowed stubbornly, tail tip twitching. She pulled herself to her paws. "We can't push this away, Mossdapple. It sounds serious."

Mossdapple's eyes narrowed. "I'm not pushing it away, Bluestar," she replied, an edge to her tone. "I'm saying StarClan usually aren't so straightforward."

Bluestar's tail tip twitched to and fro. "I need to go for a walk," she murmured, padding out of the den.

"Make sure you walk near the river!" Mossdapple called after her, half-joking.

Bluestar's head was swarming with thoughts about the vision and the fire as she distractedly padded out of camp.

--

Bluestar sat next to the river, staring blankly into ThunderClan territory. She could feel the heat of the flames burning at her fur and the smoke rising into the air and into her jaws. She blinked the vision away. *It won't happen*, she tried convincing herself. But nothing worked. All that the helping thoughts did was make her

more worked up over the fire.

She bent down to lap at the water but found it wasn't enough and waded into the river, enjoying the feeling of it lapping at her fur.

You are fire, and you will blaze through the forest.

Bluestar's head snapped up as for the first time in moons, Goosefeather's prophecy shot through her mind, making her almost slip. She padded back out of the river, unable to think straight. *It's just the heat making you dizzy*, she reminded herself desperately. *It doesn't matter.*

She dug her claws into the ground, feeling like she would faint if she didn't find shade. She ran over to a nearby tree, relishing the shade it brought. She lay down and closed her eyes shut, unable to get the visions and prophecies out of her head.

--

Bluestar woke up, realising with a jolt that she had dozed off. She blinked the sleep out of her eyes and got to her paws. She squinted. Was that a cat running towards her? She couldn't identify the stranger until they bowled her over, pinning her to the ground and pushing her blue-grey head into the dirt and grass. Caught off guard, Bluestar could only struggle, flailing her paws for help.

As a voice whispered in her ear, Bluestar knew exactly who the stranger was. He was strong, for his kind of build, and she admired his courage. Knowing now who he was, he pushed the cat off. He studied her, green eyes wide. Bluestar smirked.

The ginger kittypet.

"I've seen you around," she mewed coolly, nodding to him. "For a kittypet, you sure caught me off guard. Though maybe it's a bit unfair to make a napping she-cat your target."

The kittypet looked away, embarrassed. "Yeah, sorry. Didn't realise," he murmured, before turning back to her. "Are you part of the wild cats?"

Bluestar purred. "I'm Bluestar, leader of RiverClan," she meowed. As she talked, a vision flashed through her head of the tom holding her down with rage in his eyes. This was the cat Thistleclaw wanted to recruit.

"You seem to be fit and eager," she continued nonchalantly. "What do you think of joining my Clan?"

The kittypet blinked, eyes full of curiosity.

"Of course, where are my manners?" Bluestar meowed quickly, dipping her head to the tom. "What's your name?"

The tom puffed out his chest, closing his eyes as if all the Clans were cheering his name. "Rusty," he replied. "Tell me more about your Clans!"

"Well, there's us, who swim in the river and hunt fish, there's ThunderClan who hunt mice in the forest, there's-"

Rusty's ears pricked and his eyes shone. "Ma'am, where is this ThunderClan? It sounds, uh, intriguing!"

Bluestar was lost for words for a second. "Uh- yeah. Just across the river."

Rusty purred, turning away. "Thank you! Maybe if I join, I'll see you again, and..." The tom kept on chattering as he scampered across the stepping stones and into ThunderClan territory.

Bluestar watched, her mouth dry. This was the tom who in another universe helped her when she was depressed. This was the tom who in this universe would become one of Thistleclaw's followers, all thanks to her. She was sure she had made a mistake. She watched him leave with wide eyes.

What have I done?

Chapter Twenty Eight

Bluestar woke up that night in the dark forest, a place she hadn't been for moons now. She looked around with a snarl, sinking her claws into the ground. Then she spotted a shape in the distance, cautiously walking towards them. The trees of the forest disappeared as she padded closer, turning into RiverClan's camp.

But there was blood staining the grass as she approached it, making her gulp. Yowls pierced the air, causing her to be hesitant about approaching. As she entered the camp, she gasped.

Bodies were littered around the camp. Sitting on a hill of bones were Thistleclaw, Whitestorm and Tigerclaw. Cats bowed at the pile, looking terrified. Thistleclaw smiled, looking satisfied. Bluestar nearly gagged as she watched. So many familiar cats who were now rotting crowfood. Stonefur, Mistyfoot, Beetlenose-

And herself, lying in the middle of the camp. Bits of meat ripped off for the birds and some bones sticking out, her ribcage clearly visible through her fur and some of the bones even showing through the ripped off flesh.

Bluestar ran past the corpse and up the bonehill, swiping at Thistleclaw. Her paw went through his face, and he paid her no notice. She hissed at him, biting into his neck, but again it seemed like she wasn't even there. No one even saw her. She jumped off the pile and sprinted out of camp, careful not to step on anything disgusting. She chased after nothing in particular, just wanting to get away from the gruesome sight. She tripped and fell into a ravine, eyes widening and a sharp inhale escaping her mouth before she went crashing down, rolling and thumping and hitting the ground, dust blowing everywhere from the impact.

She second her body hit the bottom of the ravine, her eyes shot open, wide in surprise. She looked at her moss, realising she had ripped it up in the middle of her nightmare. She got to her paws and luxuriously stretched, not remembering what had happened in

her dream that night. She stretched her jaws wide in a yawn and trotted outside.

But her relaxed stance stiffened as she saw what was happening outside. Smoke rose in the air, from the direction of ThunderClan's camp. The leader watched with eyes stretched wide as she realised there was a fire in their territory. "Stonefur, Beetlenose, Mistyfoot and Oakheart, come with me! We're going to save ThunderClan!" She yowled as a flash of lightning appeared behind her.

Oakheart nodded, gathering the three other warriors, and followed Bluestar as she sprinted out of camp. Her legs grew tired, but she refused to stop. At last, they got to the stepping stones, the fire almost right in front of them. "Mistyfoot, go to sunningrocks and help any ThunderClan cats to camp! Everyone else, come with me!"

Mistyfoot watched as the four cats bounded across the stepping stones and ran into the territory of ThunderClan. Bluestar didn't hesitate or stop once, only skidding to a halt as they made it to the camp. "We've come to help!" She screeched, coughing at the smoke. "If you're strong enough, head towards sunningrocks!"

She narrowed her eyes and saw a ginger tom struggling to get a white she-cat out of the nursery. The tom was holding a kit and trying to help the stumbling queen with her other kit. Rusty and Willowpelt!

Once Bluestar made it to the bottom of the ravine, she dipped her head to the two cats, grabbing onto a white and orange kit. "Quick!" She yowled through the kit-fluff, running back up to the top of the ravine. Rusty and Willowpelt had made it up as well, but barely, and Bluestar stared at the ginger tom. His collar was gone now and he had a warrior-like gleam in his eye. "Rusty, take Willowpelt to the sunningrocks!"

Rusty's eyes flashed with annoyance, but he realised the situation and dipped his head, helping the kits and their mother into the forest.

Bluestar was beginning to feel dizzy. Back down in the ravine, she checked for any cats who were still there, but there were none.

Feeling confident they had saved everyone, she sprinted into the bushes. She halted as she scented cats, but not in the direction of sunningrocks. She swerved around, stumbling as she sprinted to snakerocks. Were there more cats that she had to save? Maybe they were trapped there!

She stopped abruptly as a wall of fire blocked her path. Terrified, she ran around it and drew closer to the rock. Had a snake gotten someone?

But she began to feel nervous and anxious as she picked up who the scents belonged to. Sunstar, Tigerclaw, Thistleclaw and Whitestorm. Why was her nephew not helping his mate and kits? And why were all three of them with Sunstar?

Dread began to fill her stomach. She picked up on their conversation a quarter moon before, eyes wide in horror. She had to stop them before it was too late.

She neared the snakerocks, but as she was almost there, she tripped and fell. A cat leapt onto her back and pinned her down, scowling in her ear. "I-I can't let you stop them!" The cat hissed, a stutter in his voice.

"Rusty, let me go!" Bluestar snarled. "This is important!"

Rusty looked at her with terrified eyes. "Thistleclaw told me you're a traitor to ThunderClan and that you left them when they needed you most. You were the one who introduced me to the Clans! Why did you betray ThunderClan?!"

Bluestar struggled to get the young tom off, the smoke beginning to weaken her. "Because Thistleclaw's evil. He killed two of my best friends, and I'm guessing he's going to kill his own leader now! You have to let me stop him," she rasped, lying limp.

Rusty hesitated, his grip loosening. "He killed other cats...? He said StarClan asked him to kill Sunstar, a-and-"

Arching her spine, Bluestar pushed the young ginger tom off of her, jumping to her paws and sprinting off to the clearing where

snakerocks lay. She froze, almost tripping over, as she saw what was in front of her.

Thistleclaw was about to kill Sunstar.

Chapter Twenty Nine

Bluestar's ears flattened against her head as she watched the scene in front of her fold out. Thistleclaw standing over Sunstar with a grin on his face, Whitestorm looking over at the two from another rock with a cold, emotionless look on his face and Tigerclaw looking reluctant and bored, coughing and looking for intruders. His eyes met Bluestar's and he let out a cry of surprise. "Bluestar!"

Thistleclaw looked up from where he was, confused, and Sunstar kicked him off. He leapt off the rocks and tried to run away, but Tigerclaw stopped him with a snarl. "You're not leaving until you leave for StarClan."

Bluestar hissed and charged at Thistleclaw. "How dare you attempt murder on your leader! You'll be exiled for this!" She yowled.

Thistleclaw leapt out of the way neatly, a sneer plastered on his face. "Oh, Bluestar. Attempted isn't an efficient word. I'd say a more fitting phrase is succeeded."

Bluestar watched with wide eyes as Thistleclaw spun around and leapt at Sunstar from behind, tackling the tom with a snarl. "Soon ThunderClan won't be weak!" He jeered, digging his claws into the ginger tom's back. Sunstar struggled to free himself of the tom's strong grip.

"Traitor! I knew I never should have made you my deputy!" He yowled, glaring up at the tom with hatred in his gaze.

Thistleclaw snickered, eyes batting innocently as he pushed the leader's head into the ground. "Sunstar, you should know," he meowed sweetly. "I have a way of getting what I want. Ambition to be a leader is a good thing, right?"

Sunstar let out a snort of laughter, the only thing betraying his fake

glee was the rage in his eyes that exposed the sarcasm in his chortle. "Ambition to be a leader is great, but you have too much, Thistleclaw. You want to rule the whole forest, and I've been blind before now! Why did I believe you'd be a fair leader after me?!"

Thistleclaw let out a cackle. "I also wonder why, but I'm not complaining! Now it will be time for me to become ThunderClan's leader! Your time is up, and I will rule the four Clans!"

Bluestar stepped forward to interfere, but Whitestorm blocked the way. "This isn't your business. Leave and don't tell anyone what has happened here."

Bluestar hacked, staggering and staring up at her nephew with terrified eyes. "There's a fire! You need to get out, you fluff-brains!"

Whitestorm blinked, looking wary and about to collapse. "I can tell. But I've been ordered to stay here by Thistleclaw, and since he will soon be our leader, I cannot disobey him."

Bluestar's gaze was pleading as she stared at the white warrior. "I don't want any of you to die. Please, come to the sunningrocks!"

Whitestorm curled his lip and showed his teeth. "Someone's going to die," he hissed, motioning with his head to the fight scene happening behind him.

Bluestar snarled. "You're not even going to do anything to stop it!" She screeched, bowling over her nephew and pinning him to the ground with a fiery gaze. "What happened to the wise and peacemaking nephew I raised?!"

Whitestorm spat at her, eyes full of fury. "You left me," he snarled. "My father is all I have. He's made a plan, and I'm helping him. I love him so much and I know he loves me too!"

Bluestar snickered. "Think again. Thistleclaw loves no-one. The only cat he ever had feelings for was Snowfur."

Whitestorm's gaze was cold. "And you caused her to die."

Bluestar recoiled, words choking in her throat. "I didn't- I mean-

there were ShadowClan warriors!" She spluttered, confusion and terror filling her stomach. "I didn't cause her to die!"

Whitestorm's amber eyes narrowed, and he pushed her off with ease. "If you don't leave now," he meowed softly, nothing betraying the rage Bluestar guessed burned under his cool gaze. "I'll tell everyone what actually happened. You led her into a trap, saying there were ShadowClan warriors on your territory, and chased her onto the thunderpath."

A small smile appeared on Whitestorm's face, one that typically would be kind and caring, but in this situation was as terrifying as the moment when she found Snowfur dead.

"I didn't kill her," she choked out.

Whitestorm shrugged. "You didn't if you leave. But if you continue to meddle, I'll have to tell everyone the truth."

Bluestar refused to back away, her voice hardening. "No. I will not back down, Whitestorm. *Let me past.*"

Whitestorm scoffed sarcastically. "Of course I will-"

His words were cut off by a scream of terror and pain. Whitestorm's head jerked around and Bluestar sprinted past him, tackling Thistleclaw so he couldn't hurt the leader anymore. She pinned him down by the throat, making him choke. She kept her paws squarely on his throat. "If ThunderClan loses their leader, they lose their deputy as well," she hissed.

Thistleclaw's eyes were wide in terror and beginning to glaze over. She didn't stop for a second until she heard a gasp from Whitestorm, her grip loosening. The world in front of Bluestar began to blur and fade to black, but she shook the black blots from her vision. Thistleclaw would die right here and right now.

She could hear Sunstar behind her as his shallow and sharp breaths faded away. Sunstar was dead, and if she didn't kill Thistleclaw right now, he'd become the leader of ThunderClan.

Bluestar began to hack. She sunk her claws into the grey tom's

throat. He was going to die, and to her claws.

Her grip loosened once more. She would be the obvious culprit for Thistleclaw's murder. Whitestorm and Tigerclaw would have clear evidence she killed him. She'd be driven out and even more, cats would hate her.

Her grip tightened around his throat again. If she was forced to leave because of an evil cat dying to her claws, then so be it. The Clans would be safe from the grey tom's wrath and ambition. She'd have to leave and become a loner, but she'd know the Clans were in safe paws.

Thistleclaw was almost dead. The minutes Bluestar spent debating in her head whether or not to kill the deputy was only a few moments. Thistleclaw stared up at her with surprise in his eyes, eyes dulling.

Bluestar would have continued, but she collapsed and fell unconscious from the smoke burning in her lungs.

Chapter Thirty

Whitestorm could hardly hear anything over the crackling of the fire. Not the birds usually chirping their songs, not the gentle breeze rustling the grass.

And not the scream of Thistleclaw as Bluestar tried to strangle him.

The two cats lay unconscious, one from lack of air and one from too much smoke. Whitestorm approached cautiously, feeling like he would join them soon. Heat burned at his long pelt, making him burning hot and the smoke around him made him feel like fainting.

He lay down beside his father, nuzzling his stomach. He could barely breathe, taking small breaths so he wouldn't inhale too much smoke.

"He's not dead," he choked out emotionally.

Tigerclaw scowled from nearby. "Neither is she."

Whitestorm looked at the RiverClan leader, gaze hardening. His claws sunk into the ground and he stared at his aunt in hatred. The aunt who had made him miserable once she left. The aunt who was responsible for her mother's death.

He almost wished she were dead.

Shakily, Whitestorm got to his paws. "We have to get them out of there," he wheezed. "Tigerclaw, help me."

Tigerclaw inhaled sharply. "You're going to bring her to safety? She tried to kill Thistleclaw. She doesn't deserve us carrying her to the sunningrocks."

"She's a leader," Whitestorm meowed calmly. "She has nine lives. If we left her here, she'd just leave on her own. We'd seem like better cats if we took her back."

Tigerclaw snorted. "Fine, mister diplomat," he hissed, grabbing onto the she-cat's scruff.

Whitestorm quietly grabbed onto his father's scruff and dragged him into the bushes. He coughed and hacked as they went off into the forest, slowly making their way through the licking flames to sunningrocks.

--

Bluestar woke up, hacking and coughing as she woke up. Were Thistleclaw and Sunstar dead? Had she killed him and saved the Clans? It must've just been a dream.

She looked around. She was on one of the sunningrocks with RiverClan and ThunderClan and it was pouring. She moved her head weakly and saw Thistleclaw's weak body next to Sunstar. With a wheeze, she got up to her paws and stared down at him. She couldn't kill him in front of everyone, and he'd immediately go and get his nine lives.

Bluestar hung her head. She had failed. Failed Moonflower and Snowfur and ThunderClan. She looked up to see Whitestorm glaring at her icily. He stalked over with his tail lashing. "I let you live. If I left you, you would have been stripped of your nine lives because of the smoke. I will make you pay for almost killing my father. But not now."

Bluestar watched the white tom, terrified. "I'm sorry, the smoke was-"

"The smoke should've tried harder," Whitestorm hissed, turning on the leader and padding off, over to Tigerclaw.

Bluestar's ears flattened. She felt a pelt press against her and purred. "Hey, Oakheart."

"I was so worried about you! Are you alright?" Her mate fretted, giving her a quick lick on the cheek. "Did you hear what happened to Sunstar? He inhaled too much smoke."

Bluestar nodded. "I was there," she whispered. "I'll tell you later."

Eyes full of concern, Oakheart nodded. "Anyways," he meowed more briskly. "This is Firepaw, a new apprentice of ThunderClan. Apparently, he was a kittypet!"

Rusty- no, Firepaw- dipped his head to Bluestar. "We've met," he meowed swiftly.

Bluestar dipped her head. "Pleased that ThunderClan let you into their camp, Firepaw. Who's your mentor?"

Firepaw puffed out his chest fur, the glint of pride in his eyes. "Whitestorm is!"

Bluestar purred. "He'll be a great mentor. I think you'll turn into a great ThunderClan warrior, Firepaw. I'm scared of getting into a fight with you!"

Firepaw smiled curtly. "Thank you. I'd better be going to help my Clan. Goldenflower inhaled quite a bit of smoke."

Bluestar watched, her approving expression evaporating as he turned away. She turned to Oakheart and teasingly rolled her eyes. Oakheart snickered in return. He looked at Firepaw as he walked over to Whitestorm and the two spoke in low and quiet voices. Bluestar licked her stinging paw that was burned in the fire, watching the cats of ThunderClan and RiverClan talk and help each other. She lay down. *Thistleclaw will destroy this peace,* she thought grimly. *I know he will.*

Next to Bluestar, Thistleclaw began to stir. He got to his paws with a shuddering cough, then turned and stared at the RiverClan leader, hatred brimming in his amber eyes. "You..."

Bluestar's tail lashed, and she leaned in close to her enemy. "If you dare tell anyone about when I didn't kill you, I'll tell everyone about when you killed Sunstar and Crookedjaw and Thrushpelt," she spat, eyes blazing.

Thistleclaw's mouth twisted into a sneer. "I was helping my Clan. It was a sunningrocks battle."

Bluestar snorted, taking a step back. "You can try that excuse all

you want, but it will never work," she hissed.

Thistleclaw stared at her for a few moments longer, snarling. Raising his voice, he began to speak. "The fire has wounded us, ThunderClan! But we will stay strong with no other Clan's help. I will be off to the moonstone with Spottedleaf right now to get my nine lives. When I am back, we will rebuild this Clan!"

His last words were raised into a yowl, and the cats of ThunderClan began to chant.

"Thistleclaw! Thistleclaw!" They cheered, eyes shining with hope.

Bluestar dipped her head to the grey tom. "Good luck at the moonstone," she mewed through gritted teeth.

Thistleclaw gave her a dazzling grin, the hatred in his eyes contrasting the smile. "Thank you, Bluestar. And thank you, RiverClan, for saving us. You can leave now."

Bluestar's eyes narrowed as Thistleclaw's tail flicked dismissively. "Are you sure you don't need assistance with your Clan?" She asked kindly.

Thistleclaw's fur bristled. "Of course not," he meowed levelly. "You may leave us now. Whitestorm can escort you. Spottedleaf, let's go."

Bluestar dipped her head as Whitestorm reluctantly padded over to her. "We can get ourselves over the rocks and to our territory," she meowed.

Whitestorm, relieved, nodded and padded away.

--

As the patrol of RiverClan cats padded through their territory, Bluestar heard a rustle in the bushes. She turned and saw Willowpelt with her kits following her. The queen's head hung.

"I want to come with you and join RiverClan."

Chapter Thirty-One

"What?" Bluestar meowed softly, staring at the mother in surprise.

"Whitestorm was my mate," Willowpelt replied, eyes pleading. "He loved me. Or I thought he did. I only realised after the fire he never cared about me or the kits! If he did, he would've saved me from the fire! I would have died if it weren't for you, Bluestar. Please let me be a part of your Clan."

Bluestar's eyebrows furrowed. "I don't want to make a bad reputation for RiverClan. If you leave, you will be a part of RiverClan forever and you can't leave again. You will be disrespected and hated for the longest time before you prove yourself to your Clan. Even then, cats will think you're a traitor. Your kits may grow up disrespected."

Willowpelt frowned. "Well, of course, I won't let that happen!" She protested.

Bluestar looked down at the queen with sympathy in her eyes. "You'll have to fight Whitestorm and your friends."

Willowpelt's claws sunk into the earth and she shrugged. "I'll fight Whitestorm with no hesitation. He left me and my kits to die."

Bluestar smiled and dipped her head, tail tip twitching. "Okay, Willowpelt. But you will be treated like a prisoner at first, I'm afraid to say," the leader meowed, flicking an ear. "Let's go back to camp."

Bluestar picked up a kit and helped Willowpelt and the other two kits back to RiverClan's camp and Willowpelt's new home.

--

"Bluestar, why did you bring an enemy warrior here?!"

Oakheart was staring at her sharply and Bluestar felt like shying away under his gaze. But she stood strong.

"Willowpelt and her kits were treated horribly in ThunderClan by her mate and others too. In the fire, she was left to die and her mate didn't help her. She has asked to join RiverClan with her kits."

Oakheart snorted. "We already have a bad reputation!" He protested, tail lashing from side to side. "We don't need more ThunderClan cats."

Bluestar leaned in close to her mate, muzzle near his ear. "Imagine how it would feel for you to stay in RiverClan but me and my kits driven out by Hailstar," she murmured. "Please, have a bit of sympathy here."

Oakheart's eyes softened and he gave up. "I guess so," he muttered.

Stonefur padded over to the newcomer, dipping his head curtly. "Welcome to RiverClan," he meowed calmly. "You can make a nest in the nursery."

Willowpelt dipped her head, looking nervous, and padded into the den with assistance from Mossdapple. After the medicine cat exited the den again, Stonefur sighed. "Oakheart and Bluestar, how about we have a quick talk in the leader's den?"

Bluestar nodded, leading the way into her den with the two warriors following close behind.

--

Inside the leader's den, Stonefur's calm demeanour evaporated. "What were you thinking?! Letting an enemy warrior into our camp! You couldn't have even asked your deputy?!" He snarled.

Bluestar blinked in surprise, ears flicking up and eyes narrowing as she gazed at her son.

"She was a queen and she had kits," she meowed coolly. "Imagine what would've happened for you if we were exiled from RiverClan. I'm trying to do the right thing."

Stonefur scowled, dipping his head. "I know you are, but why couldn't you have asked me what I thought? What use am I other than sorting out the patrols if you don't come to me with help like this?!"

Bluestar's hard gaze softened. "I'm sorry, Stonefur," she meowed. "I promise I'll come to you next time and I'll listen to you. It's just that Willowpelt's story is a lot like mine. I felt so bad and it all felt so familiar to me. I didn't want to be like Darkstar."

Oakheart's ears pricked. "How do you-"

Bluestar shrugged off the question. "Doesn't matter," she meowed simply. "Now, I need to tell you two something about Thistleclaw."

"Thistlestar, soon," Oakheart muttered.

Bluestar nodded. "He killed Sunstar," she hissed.

Stonefur jumped to his paws. "T-That's a large accusation, Bluestar," he stammered, looking taken aback and surprised.

"I was there when he killed him in the fire," Bluestar croaked, the awful memories rushing back to her and making her flinch. "I tried to save him, but I couldn't. Whitestorm, Tigerclaw and Firepaw blocked my way. I managed to get past Whitestorm but it was too late. So I tackled Thistleclaw and I tried to strangle him. I knew it was my only chance to stop him before he became a leader and I was so close-"

"You tried to kill Thistleclaw?!" Oakheart hissed, tail bushed out.

Bluestar's eyes narrowed. "I had to. I had a vision from StarClan. They showed me a camp full of dead RiverClan cats and Thistleclaw sitting on a hill of bones. There will be a horrible danger for all four Clans now that I have failed to kill him. I was so close, but the smoke got to my lungs and-"

She broke off with a cough. "I fell unconscious. I nearly lost a life."

Oakheart gasped and nuzzled Bluestar's cheek. "You nearly died!"

"That'd make both Thistleclaw and me," the leader meowed wryly.

"I'm glad you told us that," Stonefur meowed, sitting back down and gazing at her with concern in his eyes. "You need to tell the Clans at the gathering tonight."

Bluestar nodded. "I will try to. He killed cats and I'm going to make sure they get avenged. Now, could you two leave me to rest in here? I've had a long day," she chuckled with a cough.

Oakheart and Stonefur exchanged a worried glance, then her son left. Oakheart hesitated. "You don't want me with you?" He meowed, eyes glittering with concern.

Bluestar yawned, curling up in her nest. She opened a blue eye at him and smiled. "I'm fine, Oakheart. You did a great job today," she meowed drowsily, beginning to fall asleep.

Oakheart walked over and licked her between the ears like Moonflower did when she was a kit. Then he left and left Bluestar alone with her thoughts.

I failed, she thought to herself sadly. But I can still make things right. Maybe StarClan won't even want to give that treacherous cat nine lives.

She repeated the calming thoughts in her head, knowing deep down they weren't true.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Bluestar leapt up onto the great rock and dipped her head to Thistleclaw. Cats gathered below the four Clans, sharing tongues and stories. Thistleclaw's eyes narrowed.

"You've gone to the moonstone?" She asked, staring at Thistleclaw's emotionless eyes.

Thistleclaw nodded curtly. "I am Thistlestar now," he replied. He leaned in close to Bluestar.

"How about you just give up RiverClan now? It'd make things a lot easier," he whispered into her ear.

Bluestar took a step back, looking at him scornfully. "Congratulations," was all she said.

Thistlestar growled, turning back to the crowd. His tail twitched two and fro. "Let's start the gathering!" He yowled.

Immediately there was silence and cats turned to the ThunderClan leader. Tallstar gave Thistlestar a smile and stepped forward. "WindClan is well. Onepaw is now Onewhisker and Mudpaw is now Mudclaw."

"Onewhisker! Mudclaw! Onewhisker! Mudclaw!" Cats cheered for the new warriors. Bluestar saw them nearby Oakheart. Onewhisker looked at his paws with a shy smile and Mudclaw stood up straight and puffed out his chest, grinning.

Tallstar dipped his head after the cheering ceased. "Bluestar, you can go next."

Bluestar stepped forward, tail tip twitching from Thistlestar's suggestion earlier. "RiverClan is well. We hope ThunderClan is

alright after the fire," she meowed, glancing at the leader. She hesitated, before adding, "Willowpelt and her kits have joined us because she felt abused and mistreated in ThunderClan."

Cats voices rose. Some yowled at her and some at Thistlestar.

"How dare you make a queen and her kits feel mistreated in her clan!" ShadowClan's medicine cat snarled.

Bluestar snuck another glance at Thistleclaw, satisfied. "Right now she is a prisoner but is being looked after. I suspect she will soon prove herself as a RiverClan cat."

ShadowClan's leader scoffed. "RiverClan seems to be taking in more of ThunderClan's traitors," he meowed, broken tail lashing. His flat, broad face was twisted in a sneer.

Bluestar's eyes widened and she hissed at the new leader, not saying anything in reply and just staring at him with an enraged gaze. She looked back at the cats in the crowd, seeing some look uneasily at Whitestorm and fixing him with hostile eyes. Whitestorm raised his chin. "If Willowpelt left because she was upset I didn't love her, then good riddance," he meowed strongly from the front of the crowd.

Bluestar recoiled in disgust and cats began to hiss and snarl at the white tom. Whitestorm didn't care, only glaring up at Bluestar.

"I'll go next," ShadowClan's leader snarled, almost knocking Bluestar over as he stepped forward. "I am now Brokenstar, leader of ShadowClan."

Cats gasped once more, staring up at him. "B-but Raggedstar was only made a leader a few moons ago!" Bluestar stammered in disbelief.

Brokenstar silenced the RiverClan leader with a fiery glare, making her flinch back. "Raggedstar lost his nine lives to a WindClan patrol-"

Thistlestar's eyes flashed and he got to his paws. "Let's not have an argument," he meowed coolly. "I will report what's happened with

ThunderClan."

He nonchalantly licked a paw, staring at the cats of all four Clans. "We all seem to have had a lot of drama going on lately and sadly I have more to contribute. ThunderClan feels bad for your loss, Brokenstar, and-"

"Get on with it!" A cat meowed from the crowd.

Thistlestar scowled. "Of course," he meowed through gritted teeth, faking a smile. "Our former leader, Sunstar, died of smoke inhalation in a fire. We thank RiverClan for help when we needed it in the fire, but they couldn't help Sunstar's death."

He glanced at Bluestar, his look clearly saying you couldn't have stopped me.

"We all miss him so much and he was such a great leader. But I, Thistlestar, promise to be a leader like him. Our new deputy is Whitestorm."

"Thistlestar! Thistlestar!" Cats cheered.

Bluestar recoiled slightly. Whitestorm?! She thought in surprise. Thistlestar's reign would never be over now.

"We were also very worried about Willowpelt," Thistlestar meowed slowly. "But I'm glad she and her kits are safe in RiverClan. We have two new apprentices, Firepaw and Greypaw. Firepaw might've once been a kittypet but he's one of our fiercest cats!"

"Firepaw! Greypaw! Firepaw! Greypaw!" The Clans cheered once more. Some sounded reluctant to be cheering for a kittypet.

Bluestar nodded curtly and opened her jaws to say something, but Thistlestar interrupted her.

"We are very glad to have a forest healing so fast after the fire and we are strong!" He meowed.

"Is the gathering over now?" Bluestar asked impatiently, claws digging into the rock.

Thistlestar's eyes narrowed. "Not completely," he murmured. "I'd like to talk to you three."

Brokenstar yawned, looking like he had heard this many times. Tallstar leaned in with interest and Bluestar scowled at the bossy ThunderClan leader.

"I was thinking of ThunderClan merging with one of your Clans? We would become one, become TigerClan from the ancient days! Wouldn't we all be so much stronger if this happened?"

Brokenstar snarled. "ShadowClan have told you already: no. We are fine how we are and we don't need ThunderClan and their kittypets helping us."

Thistlestar's eyes flashed and for a second he looked like he was going to leap at the tom. Then he inhaled and exhaled deeply, nodding. "Alright. If you ever change your mind, we will be willing to co-operate."

"StarClan has always said there are four Clans in the forest!" Bluestar protested with a hiss, staring into Thistlestar's amber eyes.

Thistlestar ignored her and looked at Tallstar. "And you?"

Tallstar shook his head. "No," he replied simply. "There are four trees and four seasons, just as there are four Clans. We will stand alone."

Thistlestar nodded, looking like he was only just controlling his anger. Through gritted teeth, he continued.

"If any of you want to become part of TigerClan, the offer is still open," he meowed, leaping off of the great rock. "ThunderClan, let's go."

Seething, the tom flicked his tail for his Clan to follow him, walking out of the gathering hollow.

Bluestar watched, her fur bristling and a snarl on her face.

We're safe for now. But now I know that Thistlestar truly wants control,

she thought with narrowed eyes.

But I will do anything to stop him.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Bluestar was woken up by Thistlestar's yowl that rung through RiverClan's camp. She stalked out of her den and glared at him as he strode through the camp.

"Thistlestar," she meowed. "Come into my den and we will talk privately. Mossdapple, Stonefur, come with me."

With a final scowl at the bossy ThunderClan leader, she turned and padded back into her den, tail lashing from side to side. She was aware of Thistlestar following her, his vibrant mood vanishing like mist as he took a step into her den. She sat down and studied him as her medicine cat and deputy padded into the den.

"So?"

Thistlestar glowered at her, not saying anything for a few moments. "This is your last chance," he meowed quietly. "Join ThunderClan to become TigerClan or we will wipe you and your pathetic Clan out of the forest."

"What?" Bluestar asked, taken aback. "What about the gathering?"

The ThunderClan leader let out a *mrrow* of amusement. "I was just saying that. Are you saying you really thought I'd let you join me whenever? I'm going to go to each camp to say the same thing once you've joined me, and-"

"Once?" Bluestar asked with a disbelieving chuckle. "We're not joining you, Thistlestar."

Thistlestar paused, looking surprised. "Oh-" He burst out into laughter, eyes gleaming with amusement. After he stopped, he stared at Bluestar with unblinking eyes. "I'm not giving you a

choice."

The tom's claws sunk into the ground. "If you don't join me now, I'm going to have to destroy RiverClan! You do realise that, right? Either way, you will not be a leader of a Clan. It's a perfect plan, right?"

"We'll stop you," Bluestar snarled.

This only made Thistlestar more hysterical, almost insanely so. "You'll stop me? I truly admire your determination, Bluestar. But your pitiful Clan could never destroy mine. My warriors have been training for battle and are extremely strong now! So good luck. It seems you've made your choice as to what you'll do."

With an innocent glance, he smiled. "I'll miss your cats. It's sad that they will pay for a decision that you made."

Stonefur growled from behind Bluestar, reminding her he was there. "We'll train twice as hard, then. This is not a battle you will win, Thistlestar."

Thistlestar smirked. "Oh, I think you'll find out soon enough that it is. Good day, Stonefur and Mossdapple. I wonder what it's like for you to have such a petty mother?"

He turned and padded out, leaving the cats' fur ruffled and eyes narrowed.

Bluestar flicked her tail. "If he wants a battle, he'll get one. Stonefur, we will focus on battle training. Get patrols to go out and train for the war that Thistlestar has brought upon us," she meowed gravely. "If that foxheart wants a fight, he will get one."

--

Bluestar led a patrol to RiverClan's training hollow. Whiteclaw, Beetlenose and Reedpaw followed her. She turned her head as they arrived, looking at her former apprentice with admiration. Now he had a mate, kits and an apprentice. She remembered when he was first learning to hunt or fight.

"Alright," she meowed, looking at the three cats. "Who'd like to start?"

Whiteclaw stepped forward, eyes glimmering with a challenge. "Me!" He meowed eagerly.

Bluestar nodded. "Okay. Let's have a fake battle to see how rusty you are. Remember, claws sheathed. You win if you pin me down and I can't get up, or vice versa. You also win if I say 'I give up.' Sound good?"

Whiteclaw nodded, slipping easily into a crouch. "Who starts?"

"You can attack me," she meowed calmly.

The black tom looked back at his apprentice. "Watch my moves and see how I do things, okay?"

Reedpaw nodded, looking excited and in awe of his mentor.

Whiteclaw turned back and out of nowhere leapt at Bluestar, his eyes fixed on her shoulder. She jumped neatly away, fake raking her claws along his side.

Whiteclaw turned and scowled at her, rearing up on his back paws to strike on her spine. Bluestar was ready and swiftly moved to butt him in the chest with her head. Whiteclaw realised and took off the weight on one paw, falling onto his side and rolling away. He quickly leapt back up to his paws, snarling at her. "I'll get you!"

Bluestar grinned. "You can try-ah!"

Quickly Whiteclaw ran over to her and swiped at a forepaw, making her lose balance and fall onto her back. He stood over her, looking triumphant. Bluestar used all the strength in her hind legs to kick up at his stomach and push him off, quickly jumping to her paws.

Whiteclaw seemed to know this was going to happen, slipping under her stomach once he got up and pretend raking it and then biting softly onto her tail. Then he lowered and before Bluestar realised what had happened, nipped at her hind legs and drove her

back. She found she wasn't ready when Whiteclaw pushed her over and pinned her down once more, but stronger.

Bluestar looked at him angrily for a second, before dipping her head. "Good work, Whiteclaw! I trained you well."

The warrior grinned, letting her up and butting her shoulder playfully. Bluestar snickered. "Beetlenose, try battling Reedpaw. Don't be too hard on him, as he's new to this. Whiteclaw, we can sit down for a few minutes if you'd like. I'm exhausted!"

Whiteclaw huffed in agreement, sitting down with a thump. "That was fun," he meowed. "I haven't done anything like that in a while!"

Bluestar nodded, sitting down quietly next to him. "It was very fun," she agreed with a sigh. "But we need more than that if we want to beat Thistlestar and ThunderClan."

Whiteclaw looked at her sympathetically. "You know," he meowed with a purr. "I think we can do it. Surely Thistlestar was exaggerating?"

"Thistlestar never exaggerates," Bluestar meowed wryly.

Whiteclaw shrugged. "Well, if we just train a bit every day, we'll grow strong enough to take on those foxhearts ourselves!" He purred. Then he paused, glancing at the leader with an apologetic expression. "Sorry, you used to be part of them, so-"

"No. I agree with you. Most of them are foxhearts," Bluestar replied simply. She lifted her muzzle to the sky.

Whiteclaw's words gave her a flicker of hope no other cat could.

Chapter Thirty-Four

"How many lives does she have left?"

A cat with glimmering transparent fur with eyes that glittered like stars stared at a grey tom with amber eyes. They locked gazes, the grey tom's burning with rage. The starry cat took a step back nervously, unsure what to say.

"Sweetpaw!" The grey tom roared. "Answer me! Don't just sit there like a mouse-brain!"

Sweetpaw, the starry cat, flinched back, eyes flashing with hurt. "Thistlestar, I-"

Thistlestar stalked closer to the smaller cat, a snarl plastered on his face. "If you don't tell me then I'll-I'll-"

He broke off with a sigh. "I'm sorry. I've been so stressed as a leader. I hope you understand," he meowed, his voice suddenly silky and soft.

Sweetpaw leaned in and gave the larger cat a lick on the cheek. "It's okay. I'm not mad. You're my brother!"

Thistlestar grinned. "I'm glad," he meowed. Sweetpaw's eyebrows furrowed. Was that sarcasm in his mew.

"I'm not a kit, you know! I'm-"

Thistlestar cut off the smaller she-cat's protest. "Of course you're not," he meowed sweetly. "You were the biggest apprentice in the den."

Sweetpaw glared at her big brother. *Stop patronising me!*

Thistlestar looked like he was about to lose his patience. "Just please tell me how many lives she has left."

Sweetpaw sighed. "Okay," she mumbled. "But I feel like this is a mean thing to do."

Thistlestar rolled his eyes. "It's fine."

Sweetpaw looked at her paws, inhaling deeply.

"She has eight."

--

Bluestar padded back to camp with Mistyfoot, Timberfur and Petaldust. They had just been training once more and were doing well. She looked warmly at her daughter. "Great work today," she purred.

Mistyfoot smiled. "Thanks, Bluestar."

Bluestar nodded in reply, trotting into camp. She raised her muzzle to the sky, looking at the colourful sky as the sun began to set. The blue-grey she-cat yawned and suddenly felt weary and tired. Her eyes drooping, she padded into her den and lay down, closing her eyes and letting sleep gently wash over her.

--

Bluestar woke up in her den. It was a lot darker and she drowsily got to her paws. The tangy scent of blood reached her nose, making her panic. She bolted out of her den, all evidence that she was tired gone. But there was nothing in the camp apart from a cat who sat near the entrance. At first, Bluestar guessed it was a cat keeping guard, but her breath caught in her throat as she drew closer. The cat's familiar body type and fur colour made dread start to form in her stomach.

The cat slowly turned their head, fixing Bluestar with an intense green gaze. Bluestar crouched, pressing her stomach to the ground.

She stared with panic in her eyes.

"Mapleshade," she choked out. Then her eyebrows furrowed and she slowly pulled herself to her paws. "I haven't seen you in a while."

"No hello?" Mapleshade whined, eyes blinking innocently. "I'm so sad."

Bluestar's eyes narrowed and her claws sunk into the grass. "I'm not afraid of you anymore, Mapleshade."

The tortoiseshell she-cat gasped. "You were afraid of me before?! I'm so honoured!"

Bluestar crouched to spring at the she-cat, making her more amused.

"You can't touch me, Bluestar," she meowed softly. "But I can touch you. This will only end badly for one of us."

Bluestar snarled. "Why are you here? What do you want after so long?"

Mapleshade licked a paw and examined her claws. "I wanted to catch up. See how your kits are doing," she meowed, fury burning in her eyes. "Your surviving kits."

Bluestar's tail lashed. "Foxheart," she growled.

Mapleshade recoiled, looking hurt. "What a horrible thing to say to a queen who just lost her kits!"

Bluestar scowled and took a step back as Mapleshade's expression grew serious and she leaned in close to the leader's face. "If all went well, Petalkit, Larchkit or Patchkit would have had Shellheart. I would be living happily in RiverClan as an elder as Shellheart had Oakheart and Crookedjaw!"

Bluestar's eyes widened. "What?" She asked softly.

"Appledusk took another mate, Reedshine. She had a kit who had Shellheart who had Oakheart and Crookedjaw," Mapleshade spat,

looking insane, driven mad by grief and loneliness.

"Why are you telling me this?" Bluestar asked, eyes narrowing.

Mapleshade's eyes lit up. "You're going to face grief like me, I know it. Stonefur and Mistyfoot and Mossdapple will die while you have a few lives left. You will realise how horrible it was for me!" She cackled.

Bluestar growled. "I won't let them die," she protested.

"I said that about my precious kits," Mapleshade responded, eyes glittering with fury. "But they still died! StarClan was cruel to me because I broke the code, why won't they do the same to you?!"

Bluestar felt sympathy pierce her heart. "Maybe it wasn't StarClan," she meowed. "Maybe it was Darkstar and Oakstar."

Mapleshade snarled, lashing out with a paw at Bluestar's face. She narrowly missed, dodging the claws by a whisker.

Then the tortoiseshell she-cat froze, grinning. "You have a visitor," she meowed softly.

"What?" Bluestar asked, confused. "Who?"

Mapleshade groomed herself. "It's going to be so fun!" She yowled, not hearing Bluestar. "You and your disgusting family will be destroyed!"

Bluestar's eyes widened. "Wake me up," she meowed slowly, knowing full well who the cat would be.

Mapleshade let out a mrrow of emotion. "You will realise what it's like to have everything gone from you! I'll finally win! I'll- I'll- You'll get your revenge!"

"Revenge for what?!" Bluestar hissed.

"Being happy!" Mapleshade snarled in reply. "Having a great family without dealing with the loss of losing your kits!"

Bluestar jumped at Mapleshade. "I lost my mother and my sister! My nephew who I raised hates me! I have definitely dealt with loss!"

Mapleshade leapt out of the way, getting ready to swipe at Bluestar.

The second her sharp claws hit the leader's face, she woke up, jumping to her paws. Sunlight shone through the den and she could hear birds gently chirping. It was a beautiful day outside, but she knew the grass would be covered in blood after what was about to happen.

Slowly she padded out of the den to see cats of ThunderClan padding into camp, with Thistlestar in the lead. He dipped his head to Bluestar, eyes full of glee.

"Good morning, Bluestar."

Chapter Thirty-Five

Bluestar growled. "Thistlestar."

The dark grey tom gave her a dashing grin. "How about we have a chat in your den?" He asked. "Whitestorm, Tigerclaw, come with me."

The two toms stepped forward from the crowd of ThunderClan cats that had moved all around the camp, nodding and following the ThunderClan leader into the den. Thistlestar poked his head out. "RiverClan better not try anything," he snarled.

Bluestar dipped her head reluctantly. "Stonefur, Whiteclaw, come with me."

Seething, the blue-grey she-cat brought her warriors into her den to talk with Thistlestar and his closest ThunderClan followers about the grim future of RiverClan.

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"So," Thistlestar began, "What has RiverClan decided to do? Be exiled by ThunderClan's strongest warriors, or join them as TigerClan? The choice is yours."

Unsettled by Thistlestar's purr, Bluestar turned to the two warriors. Both looked enraged by Thistlestar's proposition.

Bluestar turned back, meeting the tom's amber gaze defiantly. "We have decided," she meowed calmly, "That we will not join you in your pursuit to take over the forest."

Though Thistlestar's eyes were shining with hatred, his words were calm. "Ah. Why is that?" He meowed coolly. "It would be better for both our Clans if we had one less group of cats to worry about. More prey and territory."

Bluestar's eyes narrowed. "I will not bow down to you."

Thistlestar's eyebrows lifted. "This seems like a stubborn and selfish move, Bluestar. Letting your grudges getting in the way of important decisions such as these," he meowed, shaking his head.

Bluestar forced herself to stay calm. "This is not coming from a personal place, Thistlestar. I assure you of that. This is because I believe you and your ambition needs to be stopped, for all of the Clans. We will not be joining you," she meowed firmly, meaning every word she said.

Thistlestar scowled, turning away. "Are you sure about this? You'd rather get driven out of the forest than be safe with ThunderClan? You'd see your friends again."

The idea sounded slightly tempting to the leader and she found a slight piece of herself leaning toward's Thistlestar's idea. She growled. "We are not becoming TigerClan and we will fight as hard as we can to stop you."

Thistlestar snarled. "Fine. Have it your way," he meowed calmly. "When all of us walk out of this den, war will start. We will pick off RiverClan's warriors one by one, starting with you and the pathetic family you started here."

Bluestar lifted her chin. "You can try," she meowed boldly. "But our warriors have trained twice as hard to be strong enough to match ThunderClan. This is a fight you will not win."

Thistleclaw flicked an ear, dismissing her words. "Okay," he meowed simply, not sounding like he believed a word she said.

Bluestar growled, turning and stalking out of her den with Whiteclaw and Stonefur following after her. She closed her eyes, her tail tip twitching to and fro, as she emerged into the sunlight and the cats waiting expectantly for them to decide on what to do. She opened her eyes and studied her cats.

"We will fight for what we have made here," she announced calmly. "Thistlestar has made it clear: he will either have us join him, or have us be driven out of the forest forever. We will fight for our right to belong in RiverClan!"

Her voice ended in a yowl, and the cats of RiverClan cheered.

"RiverClan! RiverClan!" They chanted proudly, shooting glares at the ThunderClan cats. Bluestar turned around to see Thistlestar striding out of the leader's den, a smug look on his face. "ThunderClan," he addressed. "It is time to fight for what is ours!"

--

Bluestar faced Thistlestar, the good weather coming to an end. Thunder rumbled ominously overhead. Bluestar closed her eyes. *This must be a sign from StarClan*, she thought gravely. *This will not end well for anyone.*

She inhaled deeply, holding her breath. The time where cats would die or get driven out was upon the warrior Clans and Bluestar had to fight if she wanted to stop Thistlestar's ambitious rampage. She exhaled, looking boldly at her enemy, straight in the eye. Thistlestar bared his teeth as if waiting for her signal. Her eyes narrowed and she unsheathed her claws.

Then she flicked her tail.

The camp exploded into yowls and hisses as the Clans charged at each other and locked into battle. Bluestar watched Thistlestar crouching down, preparing to pounce at her, tail flicking side to side, and jumped right over him, meeting his eye as she made the magnificent jump. Once she landed, she bit down hard on his tail, making him yowl in anger more than pain. He spun around and swiped at her cheek, making her stumble. Her foot slipped on a rock and she almost fell into the river running through RiverClan's camp.

Thistlestar didn't move, only smiling at her. He flicked his tail and Firepaw leapt at Stonefur, tackling him. The older warrior looked astonished a cat like Firepaw was attacking him and got him off with ease. But Firepaw looked like he knew that would happen.

Suddenly, behind Stonefur, Whitestorm leapt. He bowled the grey tom over and bit down hard into his neck. Stonefur let out a noise of surprise and fell limp, only twitching and breathing shallowly

before he stopped breathing.

"Stonefur!" Bluestar screeched, attempting to run over to him. But Thistlestar blocked her path, driving her to the edge of the now-deep river. She waited, and the two stared at each other in mutual hatred before Thistlestar leapt at her and grabbed onto his head with his paw.

I've failed, she realised suddenly with a jolt as everything seemed to slow down. *I never saved the four Clans from Thistlestar, and I will die here. RiverClan will have no leader or deputy and will be forced to split up. I'm sorry, StarClan. I'm sorry, Snowfur.*

He grabbed her head with his massive paw and brought it down into the water. Bluestar took a large breath, eyes widening and ears flattening before she was pushed down and forced to go under.

Chapter Thirty-Six

Bluestar faintly remembered thrashing her paws as she struggled to breathe. She kicked and flailed, but nothing worked. She tried to heave herself up as a last resort, but nothing worked.

That's all she remembered before she died.

"You have lost a life," Pinestar mewed in the starry meadows of StarClan, looking at Bluestar sadly. "Please, Bluestar. Save the Clans from Thistlestar."

But she knew she couldn't. She woke up, back in the river, unable to move or get out, knowing cats were watching but no one would dare challenge Thistlestar, and then died again.

After six more times, Thistlestar finally let her out. Dripping wet, she lifted her head out of the water and took the biggest breath she thought she had ever taken. But Thistlestar's wet paw touched a side of her neck. He pushed her head to face him, his eyes glittering with happiness and malice. "You're about to die," he whispered.

Bluestar groggily tried to push herself to her paws. "No... no!" She yowled, coughing and collapsing pitifully. Thistleclaw dug his claws into the side of her neck and slowly, painfully, brought his jaws in for the kill, to finally kill Bluestar once and for all. Pain spread through her neck and her body and she was aware of blood bubbling in her throat. The sharp pain faded and all went black.

--

"Wow, you're so great!"

Thistlekit watched Snowkit happily as she praised his leap. "Thanks!" He purred kindly.

Next to the two, Snowkit's sister, Bluekit, rolled her eyes. "We're

gonna learn leaps better than that when we're apprentices!" She boasted.

Thistlekit scowled at her, baring his teeth. "I should be a warrior before you! I'm big and strong and I should be the leader!"

Snowkit giggled. "You don't really think that right now, right? You have to be old to be a leader, like Pinestar!"

Moonflower gasped, looking down at Snowkit sternly. "Don't talk about your leader like that!" She scolded. Snowkit ducked, giggling. "Sorry, mama!"

Thistlekit looked at Snowkit fondly. "I still don't understand why I can't be an apprentice! I'm bigger than you, Bluekit!"

Bluekit snorted. "Yeah, but me and Snowkit are way older!"

Snowkit pouted at her sister, tail tip twitching. "Stop being difficult, Bluekit. It must be sad, not able to become an apprentice!"

Bluekit snorted, beginning to bristle. "Well, I'm saying why he isn't an apprentice yet and why we are going to be apprenticed any day now! Why are you so lovey-dovey over him, anyway?"

Thistlekit snarled as Bluekit turned her back and stalked off. Suddenly, the world in front of him flickered and he was with Snowkit-no, Snowpaw- as she grieved for her dead mother.

"I'm so sorry," he murmured quietly. "But she'll be happy in StarClan, I promise! And I really know she'll want you to stay strong and be the best warrior you can be!"

Snowpaw looked at him admiringly. "How are you not a warrior already?" she whispered, eyes shining as she looked at him. Thistlekit smiled warmly.

"I will be one day, and when I am, I'll be the best warrior ever! You'll be my deputy when I'm the leader," Thistlekit replied.

Snowpaw shrugged. "I don't wanna be a leader. But I'll watch as you become the best leader ever," she purred, licking Thistlekit on the

cheek. Then she sighed, shoulders slumping. "Moonflower would be so proud if Bluepaw or I became the deputy."

Thistlekit's eyes flashed and he snorted. "Moonflower can be proud from StarClan! Besides, Bluepaw won't ever become the deputy. She's mean and would be a bad deputy!" He pouted.

Snowpaw licked him between the ears. "I know you and Bluepaw don't like each other, but please try to be nice?" She asked kindly. Thistlekit hung his head, ashamed.

"Sorry, Snowpaw-"

The world flickered before him again and he was an apprentice and mourning his sister, Sweetpaw, who died from a horrible stomach bug. "I'll miss you so much," he choked out.

Snowfur padded over and nuzzled him. "I'm so sorry," she meowed softly. "She'll be happy in StarClan with Moonflower. They'll watch over you and be so proud of you. When you become the leader, remember?"

Thistlepaw tried to smile but it didn't work and he pressed against the warrior's side, letting out a sob. "I don't want her to leave me," he whimpered.

Snowfur sighed. "I know. But it's part of life and she'll look over you. You still have Rosepaw, right? And me!"

Thistlepaw didn't reply, lying his head on her shoulder. Bluefur watched with a sad blue gaze. Slowly she hung her head and padded over, pressing her nose to Sweetpaw's corpse. "I'll miss you," she murmured quietly.

Thistlepaw growled, getting to his paws and staring at the new warrior. Bluefur watched with a sympathetic expression. She opened her jaws but Thistlepaw growled and she closed it again. With a look at Snowfur, she walked away-

And suddenly Thistleclaw was in front of Snowfur's dead body. He buried his muzzle in her scruff for a second, before looking up in hatred. Bluefur sat in front of him, looking depressed and miserable.

But it didn't matter. He walked around the body and glared at Bluefur with fire in his eyes. "This was your fault," he snarled. Bluefur took a step back, surprised and sad. "What?" She whimpered, looking absolutely pathetic.

Thistleclaw snorted, eyes glittering with malice. "You know what I'm talking about," he meowed softly, staring at Bluefur with hatred. Bluefur blinked and looked away, not meeting his gaze. She closed her eyes and hung her head.

When she opened her eyes she was in the grounds of StarClan once more. She stared at Snowfur dully. "I'm sorry," she choked out. "Maybe if I were nicer to him he wouldn't be like this."

Snowfur snorted. "Don't give yourself too much credit! He would turn out like this even if you were his mate, I bet."

Bluestar looked away, hanging her head. "But-"

"I was mad when you disrespected him because he was my mate. But it wasn't your fault he turned out that way!"

Bluestar looked back at her sister, hope glittering in her eyes. "Really?"

Snowfur nodded. "Really. Now," she meowed more briskly. "Let's get going."

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Mistyfoot stared at her mother and Thistlestar in horror. Bluestar was dead. Thistlestar had drowned her multiple times and then murdered her. She staggered. "Bluestar!" She yowled, racing over to the she-cat and burying her muzzle in her fur. "Please don't go..."

Thistlestar stared down at the grieving queen coldly. He flicked his tail and turned to address the Clans. "Bluestar is dead!" He yowled. "ThunderClan has won!"

Even ThunderClan cats looked nervous and reluctant as they cheered for their Clan. Willowpelt glared from across the clearing at Whitestorm, who stared back with a hint of hurt in his eyes. Mistyfoot sunk her claws into the ground and leapt at the white tom from behind, knocking him over. "How dare you!" She screeched. "You were her kin!"

Whitestorm looked up at her angrily. "She was no kin of mine! She left me," he growled.

Mistyfoot could hardly believe what she was hearing. "She cared for you when your mother died! She taught you to love and show kindness!"

Whitestorm scowled. "She definitely showed love when she left her kin and friends in ThunderClan," he hissed. "You wouldn't understand, you were only a kit."

Mistyfoot's eyes lit up with rage and she pressed a paw on his throat. Whitestorm looked up at her, surprised, and Mistyfoot nearly clawed out his throat. But a flash of ginger knocked her over and away from the white warrior. Mistyfoot got to her paws and glared at Firepaw, an apprentice of ThunderClan.

Darkstripe stalked next to the former kittypet, giving him an approving glance. "Thistlestar!" He yowled, tail tip twitching. "I think Firepaw has definitely earned his name today!"

Thistlestar nodded with a smile. "Take the half-clan cats to the prisoners' den. Firepaw, step forward."

Mistyfoot heard Firepaw become Fireblaze as she was rushed to the elders' den with Mossdapple, thrown in and watching as cats began to stand guard. She stared into Mossdapple's dull eyes in confusion. "Wheres Stonefur?"

Mossdapple let out a sob. "He's dead."

Mistyfoot's eyes widened and she let out a loud, grieving wail. Mossdapple closed her eyes and pressed against her sister, laying her head on her shoulder. Mistyfoot felt herself dozing off and sighed.

--

Mistyfoot woke up to Fireblaze nudging her out of the den. "Both of you, get out," he meowed coldly, tail tip twitching. "It's time for your execution."

Usually, Mistyfoot would shove and fight to not be killed by Thistlestar, but she found herself agreeing and padding out of the den. *If I die here*, she thought sadly, *I could join Bluestar and Stonefur.*

In the clearing, Thistlestar looked down on her on a small pile of bones. It was now the afternoon and the sun was high in the sky. Mistyfoot dipped her head. "If you're going to kill us, do it quick," she meowed quietly.

Reedpaw burst out of the crowd with a wail. "You can't!" He yowled, staring at her pleadingly. "I need you! Don't die!"

Mistyfoot sighed. "What's the point?" She meowed quietly. "Bluestar, Stonefur and RiverClan are dead. You'll stay strong for me, right?"

Reedpaw swiped at her with a paw. "Why won't you stand up for yourself and fight?!" He protested, looking distressed.

Mistyfoot sighed. "Why should I? No matter what I do, my family and home are gone."

Reedpaw's eyes flashed with anger. "I'm your family! And so is Mossdapple! And your Clan is still here! Please, Mistyfoot!"

Mistyfoot stared at him, and then unsheathed her claws. "Okay."

From up on the bonehill, Thistlestar let out a snort of laughter. "Oh no! I'm not going to kill you! I'm going to send you and your sister off to exile, to live on your own away from the Clans."

Mistyfoot took a step back, unsure if she felt relieved or terrified. Thistlestar's eyes glittered. "Spottedleaf can escort you off of our territory," he finished.

Reedpaw stared at Mistyfoot in horror as Spottedleaf nudged her forward. "You'll visit, right?" He whimpered.

Thistlestar let out a mrrow of amusement. "Of course she won't! If either of them are seen on our territory, they will be killed on sight. Capiche?"

Mistyfoot opened her jaws to protest, then thought better of it, nodding and hanging her head. "Yes, Thistlestar."

Mossdapple pressed against her as Spottedleaf fixed her with a glare. "You're a medicine cat," Mossdapple murmured, looking terrified. "You have to help us!"

Spottedleaf looked away. "My loyalties are to Thistlestar," she mewed simply. "Not to a former medicine cat and her sister. But I will give you some travelling herbs for your journey."

Mistyfoot relaxed as Spottedleaf nudged a bundle of herbs towards her and her sister. "It may taste... bitter, but it will help you."

Mistyfoot glanced at her sister. *This is it*, she thought despondently. *We're about to leave the Clans forever, never to return or see Reedpaw. Bluestar and Stonefur are dead, and all we have is each other. We're about to leave everything we've ever known and everything we've ever loved in our lives.*

Mossdapple seemed to be thinking the same, her eyes dull and sad as she bent down to lap up the herbs. Mistyfoot was about to do the

same until she saw a familiar blue-grey shape stalk up behind the bonehill, blue eyes glinting. Not wanting to seem suspicious, she bent down next to Mossdapple. *The herbs won't do anything, so we can eat them before...*

"Wait-" Mossdapple yowled, recoiling. But Mistyfoot was about to eat the herbs. "Mistyfoot, get back! There are deathberries!"

Mistyfoot stopped, looking at her herb bundle and seeing the glint of the red berries. She looked up, furious, at Spottedleaf. "You were going to poison us!" She yowled.

From up on the bonehill, Thistlestar prepared to leap at one of the two sisters. But then a flash of blue-grey pounced on him from behind and Mistyfoot wanted to scream out her name and give her licks and nuzzles.

The two cats wrestled on the ground until the blue-grey cat was pinning Thistlestar down. She stepped off, pelt muddy and scarred, and stared at him with furious and icy blue eyes. She let the tom up before speaking.

"I'm here to stop you," Bluestar meowed coldly.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Bluestar stood in front of Thistlestar, staring at his surprised face. "You were dead!" He yowled.

The leader's ear flicked. "You didn't take all of my lives," she hissed. "And it's time to finally end this."

"But Sweetpaw told me-" Thistlestar started to meow, but Bluestar cut him off.

"Sweetpaw lied so that the Clans wouldn't be destroyed," Bluestar snarled. "This is the end, Thistlestar."

Thistlestar snickered. "You're going to take all nine of my lives, are you?" He sneered.

Bluestar's eyes narrowed. "If you almost did, I definitely can."

For a second, a flash of worry appeared in Thistlestar's amber eyes, and he looked... scared? The look of fear was swiftly replaced by rage. "Not if I kill you first! You must not have many lives left, so I can easily kill you!" He yowled.

Bluestar ducked as Thistlestar leapt for her, biting onto his tail as he passed. With a screech, Thistlestar swerved around and scratched her muzzle. Bluestar hissed and leapt at him, not planning to jump on him. As she jumped over the tom she watched his confused expression as he watched her. She nipped at a hind leg and instead of driving him away from her, he snarled and turned around. Bluestar tasted blood from the scratch on her muzzle. The salty tang made her ready to fight once more, except the blood spilled this time would be Thistlestar's.

The leader leapt at Bluestar and tackled her. The two rolled around hissing and spitting in each other's faces. Bluestar managed to pin Thistlestar to the ground, biting into his shoulder as hard as she

could. Thistlestar yowled and scratched at her belly with his hind legs, making her get off and roll away. She hissed at him, slashing at his cheek and spilling blood. Thistlestar snarled and leapt at her, pinning her down and biting her ear, beginning to pull at it. With a screech, she pushed him off and pinned him down, biting at his ear instead and pulling a chunk off, making a nick in it.

With a yowl of rage, Thistlestar pushed her off and snarled at her, looking insane. Blood trickled from his ear down his head and into his mouth. He twitched and then jumped at her. She was ready and the two grappled before Bluestar let go and jumped back. Thistlestar reared up onto his hind paws and slammed down on her head, making her dizzy. She almost fell into unconsciousness but managed to stay awake, leaping back to her paws. The two enemies stared at each other, neither making a move. Mistyfoot tried to step in, but Whiteclaw stopped her. "This is their fight," he meowed gravely, looking uneasy at the likelihood of Bluestar winning this fight.

But Bluestar was determined to prove him wrong, springing at the evil ThunderClan leader with strong hind legs. Thistlestar leapt out of the way but Bluestar was ready, jumping onto his back and clawing at it, taking out fur and making scratches on the tom's spine. With a roar, Thistlestar reared up, causing Bluestar to fall off of him and to fall with a thump on the ground. Thistlestar raised a paw to deal the killing blow to the blue-grey she-cat. Bluestar's eyes widened and at the last moment, she moved out of the way, the tom making a nasty scratch on her back. She stumbled to her paws, staggering for a second before glaring at Thistlestar. "Any second now..." she whispered.

Thistlestar lifted his chin and flicked his tail. "It seems you lost," she meowed. "As expected, of course."

Fireblaze, Whitestorm and another cat began to circle around Bluestar as she struggled to stay on her paws. She looked at the third cat, vision hazy. "Spottedleaf?" She hissed.

Spottedleaf's eyes narrowed. "Bluestar," she replied. "Such a shame Crookedjaw had to die, hm?"

Bluestar stared at her in fear. "W-what?"

Spottedleaf's tail twitched. "No hard feelings, right? Just an order from Thistlestar," she meowed calmly.

"I-I don't-" Bluestar stammered.

Spottedleaf gave Bluestar a cold grin. "It's been so fun, living a sort of double life. A trained warrior and a medicine cat. Thistlestar ordered me to lead a patrol to sunningrocks to kill you when we scented you there. I thought maybe I'd put you out of your misery, but it was a lot more fun watching your expression when Crookedjaw died. But, uh... you becoming deputy was not part of the plan," she meowed with a guilty glance at Thistlestar.

Bluestar looked up, terrified, at the medicine cat. "W-Why?"

Spottedleaf shrugged. "You know how it is. A cat saves your life, and you feel you owe 'em something. I almost died and Thistlestar took it upon himself to train me to fight as well if I fought on his side. I've enjoyed not doing much, just watching and getting involved if specifically ordered to," she continued, her speech ending in a purr. "But now, of course, I've been ordered to kill you. We could do this the easy way, or the hard way. Pick your poison: my claws in your throat, or *literal poison*."

Bluestar flattened herself to the ground and let a glimmer of defiance creep into her eyes. "You wouldn't dare," she hissed.

"I would definitely dare to kill a traitor!" Spottedleaf yowled. Cats from ThunderClan looked at the weak leader pitifully and angrily. Bluestar heard cats muttering about the traitorous things she did. In the crowd, she saw Oakheart, who looked petrified and rooted to the spot. Rain got in her eyes and made her close them tight. "You wouldn't... dare..." she repeated weakly, knowing that the she-cat definitely *would* dare. But...

Bluestar dipped her head. "I'll die the death of a warrior- to another cat, not to poison. Kill me, Spottedleaf."

Spottedleaf's eyes widened. She clearly didn't expect this to be so

easy. She shrugged and placed a paw on Bluestar's throat. The other she raised, ready to deal the killing blow. Bluestar closed her eyes tight. *Any second now, please...* she thought as she waited for Spottedleaf.

Her prayers were answered and Spottedleaf never spilled her blood. Shakily, she got to her paws as Spottedleaf took a step back and stared somewhere behind Bluestar. She turned, her eyes lighting up.

The StarClan cats had appeared.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Spottedleaf took a step back, looking at the spirits in confusion. "Snowfur, Rosetail, Lionheart... what are all of you doing here?"

The tortoiseshell's green eyes moved to each cat in turn, as if counting, and when she was done her eyes lit up in understanding. She glanced at Bluestar as if to say *did you know about this?*

In reply, Bluestar gave a curt nod. Spottedleaf's eyes narrowed and she scowled. Bluestar ignored her gesture, turning towards the starry cats and gazing at them through wide eyes. "You're here," she sighed gratefully. "One more second and I'd be dead."

Lionheart dipped her head to the leader, tail tip twitching as he turned his head to stare at Thistlestar. The grey tom didn't meet Lionheart's gaze, looking away furiously. "StarClan," he spat. "What do you want?"

Rosetail stepped forward to stand beside the lion-like warrior, glaring at her brother. "We have come to take away your nine lives," she meowed assertively, eyes glittering.

Thistlestar snapped his head up, looking panicked. "What?! Y-You can't do that," he stammered, adding quietly, "Can you?"

Bluestar felt satisfied as she saw the fear in Thistlestar's gaze. She lay down, still weak from the wounds Thistlestar brought upon her. She merely watched, not needing to say a word.

Rosetail and Lionheart stepped out of the way as Snowfur stalked forward, thrusting her muzzle in Thistlestar's face. "How dare you?" She spat. "You have abused the gift of leadership we have bestowed upon you and broken the warrior code many times over. You killed my sister eight times!"

Thistlestar's eyes flashed with hurt at his mate's words. "Snowfur, she was responsible for your death!"

Snowfur snorted. "ShadowClan was responsible-no, the monster was responsible for my death, not her! Even if she was, killing her eight times over would be too much of a punishment," she snarled, "When I met you, I thought you were kind and thoughtful and nice when you comforted me over Moonflower! But maybe you were faking that whole time. Look at what Whitestorm is now!"

Thistlestar swiped at Snowfur's muzzle but she jumped back. Eyes cold, she turned away. "You've turned into a heartless killer," she meowed icily, walking off and sitting behind the rest of the cats.

The other eight cats stood in a line, some looking behind them sympathetically at Snowfur. First, Pinestar stepped forward, eyes sad. "I take back the life I gave you for kindness," he murmured. "You've made my son show everything but that."

He touched his muzzle to Thistlestar's head and he let out a screech of pain. Cats watched, wide-eyed, at the interaction. Spottedleaf leapt at Bluestar and pinned her down. "This is your fault, isn't it?" She hissed.

Bluestar looked up at Spottedleaf coldly, not replying. Spottedleaf opened her jaws to continue before Mistyfoot shoved her off of the leader. The two she-cats stared at each other angrily. "Don't interfere," Mistyfoot warned, not focusing on the ceremony but on Spottedleaf.

When Bluestar looked over, Pinestar had stepped back and Sweetpaw had taken his place. "I take back the life I gave you for patience," she murmured, giving him a swift tap on the forehead with her muzzle and turning her back on her brother.

Once more, Thistlestar screamed in pain, staggering and then collapsing on the ground. He looked up desperately as Sunstar strode over. "I take back the life of honour, as it seems even with this life, you have none. I made you my deputy hoping for a peaceful and honourable cat, but it seems like you're the opposite."

Thistlestar let out a yowl once more as Sunstar touched his nose to Thistlestar's head. He had a spasm and then fell still. For a second, Bluestar wondered if he were dead, but he stirred and got shakily to

his paws as Rosetail walked over.

"I take back the life of honesty. You have lied many times over about who you are and what you have done, so I see no need for this life," she meowed. She put her paw on his and he let out a screech, staggering and not putting any weight on the paw. He glared at his sister as she padded away with her bushy tail lashing.

Next was Poppydawn, who looked distraught at the thought of her son being a murderer. "I take away the life I gave you, the life of hope. I had so, so much hope as you grew up that you'd be a fair leader and the best cat in the Clans but my hope was in vain," she sighed, hanging her head. She gave Thistlestar's ear a soothing lick. Usually that would be a kind gesture, but in this case, it made Thistlestar jerk and yowl in pain. He looked like he was about to tip over the edge, but there were still three more lives left.

After Poppydawn Crookedjaw stepped forward, looking the most hostile out of all of them. "I gave you the life of courage, the only life you seem to have used," he snarled. "But you may have too much ambition and courage which is bad news for all four of the Clans."

The tom's eyes softened slightly. "If you used your courage and ambition for good you could have become one of the greatest leaders the Clans have ever known."

After Crookedjaw gave Thistlestar the now familiar pain, Thrushpelt came forward. "I take back the life of optimism. I hoped, when I gave you that life, that your new nine lives would change and shape you to be better. But no, you were the same cat you were when you killed me," he meowed slightly bitterly.

Thistlestar leapt at Thrushpelt, but the second his paws met the StarClan cat's chest he let out a scream of pain, falling right through the dead cat. He snarled as Thrushpelt stepped back.

Last of all, Snowfur padded forward. "We won't kill you," she meowed, looking like she was trying her hardest to keep her cool. "I will let you keep your last life, the life of love. Maybe you can learn from your mistakes and become a better cat. Maybe it's naive of me,

but..."

Thistlestar let out a cry of despair. "Snowfur, please don't leave me," he whined, sounding like a kit. "I love you."

Snowfur shook her head slowly. "You were the one who left me. From now on, you will be known as Thistleclaw. We revoke your privileges as a leader and you will be left with Bluestar. She will decide what to do with you."

The StarClan cats all at the same time disappeared, vanishing as quickly as they came. Thistleclaw was left staring up at Bluestar, looking desperate and afraid.

Chapter Forty

Bluestar sat on RiverClan's highrock, looking satisfied. It had been a quarter moon since Thistleclaw lost his nine lives and things had gotten better for all four of the Clans. She smiled and closed her eyes, looking happy.

When she opened her eyes, a cat was sitting next to her. "Hello, Whiteclaw," she greeted with a smile.

Whiteclaw was appointed as RiverClan's new deputy since Stonefur died. *He's been doing a great job*, Bluestar reflected, *but I don't know if anyone can replace Stonefur.*

Whiteclaw dipped his head. "Hi, Bluestar. You alright?"

"Yes, actually," Bluestar responded with a purr. "Things have finally been looking brighter for RiverClan."

Whiteclaw nodded in agreement. "They have. Redstar will be a much better leader than Thistlestar- I mean, claw was."

Bluestar nodded, thinking back to Redstar reporting to her what had happened before. StarClan had visited Redstar - Redtail at the time - and said that Brightpaw would be ThunderClan's medicine cat since Spottedleaf left, trained by StarClan, and he would be the leader of ThunderClan. He had accepted modestly and earned his nine lives as a leader.

"I agree. If we get another fairer leader who isn't Brokenstar in ShadowClan, I feel like there will be moons of peace for all four of the Clans," Bluestar purred.

Whiteclaw smiled. "I'm going to go hunt. If you'd like to come...?"

Bluestar yawned. "No, I'm fine," she purred. "I'm going to check something. Thanks for asking, though."

Whiteclaw leapt off of the highrock. "Reedheart!" He yowled. Reedheart, RiverClan's newest warrior, raced over and smiled warmly at his former mentor. "Yes?"

"Would you like to come hunting with me?" The deputy asked, tipping his head to one side.

Reedheart nodded vigorously, trotting after the black tom as he strode out of camp with his tail high in the air. Bluestar watched the two leave and jumped off of the highrock, beginning to walk over to the makeshift prisoner's den. Inside was Thistleclaw, unstable and angry as ever. After the StarClan cats had disappeared, she was chosen to decide what would happen to him. She chose to make the cruel grey tom prisoner of RiverClan until she said so, which would happen when hedgehogs flew.

On the way to the den, Sorrelkit ran over to her and jumped at her. With a pretend yowl she fell to the ground. "You got me!" She purred as Sorrelkit bit down on her tail. The kit's eyes sparkled. "I won!"

Willowpelt padded after the calico she-kit, looking exasperated. "Sorrelkit, you don't attack the Clan leader. It's not polite."

Sorrelkit stared up at her mother with wide eyes. "Okay, mama," she sighed. "But Bluestar and I are similar, right?"

Willowpelt gave the she-kit a lick between the ears. "Yes. As well as me, Rainkit and Sootkit. Now it's time for a nap," she meowed sternly, nudging Sorrelkit in the direction of the nursery. As Sorrelkit was ushered off, she turned and looked at Bluestar, making a face. Bluestar made a face back, getting to her paws and chuckling. "Have a good nap, Sorrelkit," she purred as the two disappeared into the nursery.

Then, with a huff, she turned and padded over to the makeshift den, with Timberfur guarding. He dipped his head and stepped out of the way for Bluestar to walk in. She hesitated before she padded into the den where her rival lived.

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Inside the den, Thistleclaw looked up from his nest. He snarled and crouched to leap at Bluestar. Her eyes narrowed. "I'm not looking for a fight," she meowed calmly. "I was just wondering how you were doing."

Thistleclaw pouted. "I'm doing fine, thanks," he replied, voice dripping with sarcasm.

Bluestar rolled her eyes. "Do you need any prey? Any water?" She asked reluctantly.

Thistlestar curled up in a ball. "Leave me alone," he snarled.

Bluestar tipped her head to one side. "Do you miss Whitestorm and Tigerclaw?"

Thistlestar looked up, eyes glittering with hatred. "Why do you care?!"

Bluestar thought back to after Thistleclaw lost his nine lives. Redstar was told by Barley when he went to get his nine lives that Whitestorm, Darkstripe, Tigerclaw and Spottedleaf ran away straight after when no one saw. Relieved they were gone but also nervous about if the three would come back, Bluestar's feelings clashed. Fireblaze and Greystrike had been staying in ThunderClan but under strict watch, and she couldn't shake the feeling they were going to do something soon.

A snarl from Thistleclaw brought Bluestar back to the present. She looked down at the pitiful warrior as he glared at her. "I said leave me alone," he spat.

Bluestar lifted her chin. Thistleclaw and his warriors couldn't hurt him now. The grey tom was a shell of his former self, Fireblaze and Greystrike were kept under a close eye and Whitestorm, Tigerclaw, Darkstripe and Spottedleaf were gone. There was nothing to worry about. Bluestar let out a sigh of relief and turned to pad out of the den. She bristled as she felt Thistleclaw's gaze on her, angry and hostile.

Bluestar shook off the nervous thoughts, looking at her Clan with a

smile. The Clans were safe.

For now, she thought from the back of her mind. She shook the pessimistic thought and lifted her head to the sky. She closed her eyes and relaxed, lying down on the ground and purring as she stared at how the cats of RiverClan chatted and discussed different topics, lying down to share tongues. Mistyfoot lay down next to her and the two lay down next to each other. It felt like everything was right with RiverClan. Bluestar rested her head on her daughter's shoulder, purring. Mistyfoot opened an eye as Mossdapple and Oakheart came over and the four lay together. "There should be five of us," Bluestar murmured.

Oakheart twined his tail with her's, not saying anything.

Even if Stonefur's death was lying heavily on Bluestar's shoulders, she couldn't help feeling optimistic. All of Thistleclaw's followers were gone or were guarded, and Thistleclaw was heavily guarded in her camp. Everything was alright and the four Clans would be at peace. She closed her eyes and for once felt like she could live in the moment without feeling stressed about Thistleclaw, Tigerclaw or Whitestorm.

Chapter Forty-One

Bluestar was lying in the sun in RiverClan's camp. Her ear pricked as she heard pawsteps and she got up. Whiteclaw came bounding into camp, followed by Beetlenose and Onewhisker of WindClan. Bluestar dipped her head. "Onewhisker," she greeted cautiously. "Is everything alright with you in WindClan?"

"No," Onewhisker sighed, looking at Bluestar with desperation in his eyes. "Brokenstar's warriors are attacking us right at the heart of our camp and we need your help. They outnumber us!"

Bluestar's eyes rounded in sympathy for the young tom. "Okay," she meowed calmly. "Whiteclaw, Beetlenose, Petaldust, Oakheart, Mistyfoot and I will come with you to help."

Eyes glittering with anxiety, Onewhisker hung his head. "Yes, ma'am. Thank you."

Bluestar turned to face her Clan. "The cats I just listed, come with me! Whiteclaw, Beetlenose, Petaldust, Oakheart and Mistyfoot!" She called.

The cats soon ran over to her and she stared at the five of them gravely. "WindClan needs our help. Brokenstar and his cats have attacked their camp and they are outnumbered. I've chosen you to come with me and fight against ShadowClan."

After the cats nodded and agreed, Bluestar turned to Onewhisker. "Lead the way."

Onewhisker nodded vigorously and turned to run off into the bushes. Struggling to keep the same pace, Bluestar sprinted after the WindClan warrior, making sure her Clanmates were right behind her.

They ran through RiverClan territory and across the moor. As they ran, Bluestar began to lose breath. "Onewhisker!" She called, slowing down.

Onewhisker snapped his head around. "Hurry up!" He hissed, his anger driven by fear for his Clan.

"I'm sorry," she panted. "Run ahead, I'll catch up. I'm not very fast!"

Onewhisker stared at her, then nodded and ran off in the direction of WindClan camp. After a few moments that Bluestar and her patrol used to catch their breath, they followed, sprinting after the brown tabby tom.

Bluestar skidded into the camp and ran in, leaping on a ShadowClan cat she remembered was named Brackenfoot. She clawed at his cheek and pinned him to the ground. The tom snarled at her, clawing at her belly fur with his hind paws. After pummeling to get her off, he seemingly gave up, lying limp and looking desperately up at Bluestar. The blue-grey she-cat found her grip loosening and was kicked off harshly by the tom, who jumped to his paws and bit down on her tail. Letting out a screech of pain, Bluestar got to her paws and landed a clumsy blow on Brackenfoot's ear.

The tom sneered. "Is that all?" He asked. "A few lousy blows and a bit of sympathy? You gonna kill me with kindness?"

Bluestar snarled at the ShadowClan tom and tried again, hitting his head with force that made him stumble. While he was distracted, she clawed at his shoulder and jumped back. Brackenfoot looked enraged, his eyes fiery. Bluestar stared at him through narrowed eyes, her tail lashing. She used her lithe build to slip under the large pawed tom, clawing at his belly and making him yowl in terror and then biting onto his tail. The large tom glared at her and then ran off with his tail between his legs.

Satisfied, Bluestar turned to fight someone else. She saw Whiteclaw struggling to fight off Blackfoot, the Deputy of ShadowClan, and raced over. The two battered the large tom, landing blows at the same time and making him back away, looking confused. But he

focused and landed a hard blow on the side of Bluestars head, pushing her back and making her collapse. She struggled to her paws, but the second she got up Blackfoot tackled her and pinned her to the ground, spitting in her face. "You RiverClan heroes think you can save all the Clans, huh? WindClan and ThunderClan will be so grateful for your help and they will bow down to you!"

Bluestar snickered. "Not at all. My allies wanted help so I gave them some! Of course, ShadowClan cats would know nothing about keeping promises," she snarled.

Blackfoot growled and prepared to bite down on Bluestar's throat. She stared up at him coldly. "If you kill me, all the Clans will think of you as a coldhearted killer."

Blackfoot bared his teeth. "They'll congratulate me for killing the traitor and the scourge to the Clans. The cat who left her Clan because she was having a half-Clan relationship! It might seem like no-one cares, but I assure you they are all talking about you behind your back. Wouldn't it be good to stop hearing them backtalking you? I can help you with that."

Before Blackfoot could attack her any more, Whiteclaw tackled him and pushed his face into the ground. "How dare you!" He spat in the white tom's face. Blackfoot stared up, eyes blazing. He didn't say anything, just looking up with a gaze full of hatred.

He pushed Whiteclaw off and the two deputies stared at each other. Both stood as still as stone as if they were rooted to the ground and unable to move. Bluestar got to her paws shakily and stared at the rivals warily. *Who's going to attack first?* She wondered anxiously.

Before either of the deputies could launch himself at the other, the yowls of cats fighting stopped, turning into murmurs and whispers as cats began to notice Brokenstar and Tallstar, walking in a circle. Both of their gazes were locked and their lips were drawn back. Brokenstar had a cruel grin on his face, his claws sinking into the ground and his crooked tail lashing. Cats had stopped fighting and watched the two leaders before they fought.

Tallstar's amber eyes narrowed. "Brokenstar. Tell me why you have

attacked us in our own camp?" He hissed.

Brokenstar snickered. "WindClan is weak and deserves to be driven out," he snarled. "I'm beginning to think that Thistleclaw had the right idea with his idea of TigerClan. How about you join us in ShadowClan? We'll have a lovely time!"

Tallstar's eyes widened in disbelief. "Never!" he growled, dropping into a crouch.

Bluestar's eyes widened as the two leapt at each other, claws unsheathed.

Chapter Forty-Two

"Rah!"

Brokenstar had Tallstar pinned to the ground now, and the lithe tom stared up at him, enraged. With what looked like all his might Tallstar pushed the large leader off of him and swiped at his muzzle. Blood trickled down from the wound. Brokenstar snarled at Tallstar and leapt once more.

Bluestar watched the two fight with a horrified expression on her face. Brokenstar pushed Tallstar's face into the ground and the WindClan tom couldn't get him off. Brokenstar let out a cackle. "Seems that you aren't very strong!" He yowled triumphantly.

Tallstar noticed Brokenstar's bragging and took the distracted look on his face as he looked at his Clanmates to push him off once more. Quick as a snake, Tallstar leapt onto Brokenstar and pinned him down. "I am not weak," he snarled.

Brokenstar glared up at him, his legs pinned. He couldn't move. Bluestar silently cheered for WindClan's leader, hoping he could win this unjust battle. Tallstar sunk his claws into Brokenstar's cheek. "Leave WindClan's camp," he snarled. "Or I will personally make sure that you lose your lives."

Brokenstar snickered. "You can try," he sneered. "Getting a bit violent here, Tallstar."

Despite Brokenstar's scornful words, his amber eyes glittered with worry. "You wouldn't kill me," he repeated.

Tallstar's eyes narrowed. "Oh, I would. If you don't leave right now, I assure you I will take all nine of your lives," he growled menacingly.

Brokenstar sighed reluctantly. "Okay. But we'll be back," he meowed

with a glint in his eye.

Tallstar nodded curtly and let the battered leader up to his paws. With a cough, Brokenstar glowered at the WindClan leader. "ShadowClan, retreat!" He yowled, turning and sprinting off in the direction of ShadowClan's camp. Bluestar huffed, raising her chin. "And stay out!" she called.

She turned to see Tallstar leaning on Barkface's shoulder, looking weak and tired. She trotted over to him. "Are you alright?" She asked with a frown.

Tallstar smiled dismissively. "Fine. Thank you for helping us."

Bluestar shrugged. "I think you could've survived without our help. We didn't do much," she purred.

"Either way," Tallstar responded. "We're glad you came to our aid. Hopefully, Brokenstar and his cats will think twice before trying to drive us out again!"

Bluestar knew Tallstar was partly joking, but couldn't help feeling anxious. "Do you think Brokenstar was telling the truth with what he said about driving you out and taking over the Clans?" She murmured. She shuffled her paws, a motion usually only embarrassed apprentices would do.

Tallstar tipped his head thoughtfully. "I think he did," he meowed carefully. "But I don't think he'll manage to do anything about it."

Barkface nodded curtly. "Thank you and all, Bluestar," he meowed tartly. "But I need to get Tallstar to the medicine den. He has a nasty scratch on his side."

Abruptly, he turned and led Tallstar to the medicine den, leaving Bluestar confused. Deadfoot, WindClan's deputy, walked over to her. "Ignore Barkface's attitude. He's just snappy because of all the wounded cats. Thank you so much, Bluestar."

Bluestar dipped her head. "Of course, Deadfoot. Good luck to WindClan with getting better." Raising her voice, she continued. "RiverClan cats! Let's head back to camp!"

The patrol she brought didn't seem to have many injuries, just a few scratches here and there. She smiled warmly. "Good fighting. I'm glad none of us are severely hurt."

Oakheart smiled and licked her cheek. "I'm glad you're okay too!"

Whiteclaw's eyes were warm. "Let's get back to familiar territory. It's so open here!"

Mistyfoot nodded in agreement, tail high. "I'm going to have a good swim when we get back."

Bluestar sneezed as a snowflake landed on her nose. "Maybe we should stay inside when we get back," she suggested, trotting out of camp. "Let's go!"

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The patrol padded across WindClan's territory, the snowflakes beginning to fall faster. Bluestar let out a sad sigh. Leaf-bare was starting. Bluestar's ears pricked as Oakheart trotted up to her and pressed against her. "We'll make it through leaf-bare," he murmured comfortingly.

Bluestar smiled at him. "I hope so. Leaf-bare is worst for RiverClan, with the river freezing up and all," she responded anxiously.

Oakheart flicked his tail with a purr. "We'll be fine! You remember how to hunt mice and land animals, right?"

Bluestar nodded. "I think so."

Oakheart nudged her cheek. "Then we'll survive!"

Bluestar smiled reluctantly. "I guess so," she admitted. After a few moments of silence, she looked sideways at her mate. "How do you stay so optimistic about leaf-bare?"

Oakheart shrugged. "Well, we've survived through countless leaf-bares. Why should this one be any different?"

Bluestar paused and leapt into the river water, swimming strongly

to the other side. She looked at Mistyfoot behind her with amusement. "You get to have your swim!" She called.

As they continued through RiverClan territory, Bluestar looked at Oakheart thoughtfully. "I guess so. I guess I've been worrying about Thistleclaw and his friends more than actual leaf-bare. But now his followers are gone and he's prisoner, so all seems to be fine!"

Oakheart shoved her lightly. "Now you get it," he meowed. "Life is better when you're optimistic!"

Bluestar gave her mate a lick on the cheek. "I love you," she murmured.

"These past moons have been hard for us," Oakheart whispered. "I'm sorry if I've been a bad mate or I've made you regret your decision to leave ThunderClan... I feel really bad about when I was grieving over Crookedjaw."

Bluestar looked at him sympathetically. "I don't regret my decision at all. And..." She looked at her paws, embarrassed. "I think I might be expecting another litter of kits."

Oakheart looked at her in surprise. "You are? Oh, Bluestar, that's wonderful!" He meowed loudly, nuzzling her cheek. "They're gonna be so cute and they will grow up to become the best warriors!"

Bluestar purred so loudly she worried the whole Clan would hear. She rested her head on her mate's shoulder as they neared camp. "I'm a bit worried I'm too old to have another litter. My kit has a son who's a warrior, after all."

Oakheart snorted. "You'll be fine! Hey, we're at camp!" He meowed, speeding up and trotting into camp.

Bluestar followed slower, making sure all the cats of her patrol were following her. Once she padded into camp, she abruptly stopped. Reedheart scampered over to her, looking terrified out of his fur. "Help!" He yowled.

"Thistleclaw is gone!"

Chapter Forty-Three

Bluestar gasped. "Thistleclaw is gone?!" She hissed. "Why did no-one realise?!"

Petaldust flinched. "He must've snuck out! He's like a snake, Bluestar! I'm sorry!"

Bluestar's eyes narrowed. "It's alright. I'll follow his trail, and-"

A yowl came from the nursery. "My kit!"

Bluestar exchanged an anxious glance with Petaldust and ran into the nursery. Leopardfur was looking terrified. "Lionkit is gone!"

Bluestar's claws sunk into the ground. "Do you think that..."

Leopardfur looked up at Bluestar furiously. "Thistleclaw must've stolen her! We need to find him and make him pay!"

Bluestar gave the queen a comforting lick. "It's alright," she murmured. "I'll go after him and find him myself. I promise I'll bring Lionkit back with me if he has her."

Leopardfur still looked horrified but nodded with a whimper. "Please bring her back. I don't know what I'll do without her."

Bluestar smiled warmly. "I will," she meowed, padding out of the den.

When she left, she was greeted by Whiteclaw and Oakheart looking nervous. "We heard what you said-" Oakheart began.

"Let me come with you!" Whiteclaw blurted, eyes wide. "Lionkit is my daughter and I need to find her!"

Bluestar shook her head. "I'm going alone. I don't want anyone else to get hurt," she meowed firmly. She knew exactly where Thistleclaw was going.

Right to Whitestorm, Tigerclaw and Darkstripe, she thought with a lurch.

Oakheart gasped. "But your kits! What if you..."

Bluestar stared at him with an eyebrow raised. *What a silly question*, she thought tartly.

"I'm not going to have my kits for three more seasons, Oakheart. I won't be gone for that long. She waved her tail. "Whiteclaw, you need to look after the camp while I'm gone. Brokenstar might try to attack and we need you here."

Whiteclaw looked away from the leader's intense gaze. "Yes, Bluestar."

"I pray to StarClan this won't happen, but if I don't come back after a moon, then you need to go and get your nine lives," she hissed in a low voice. "Don't tell anyone else that."

"But-" Oakheart began to protest.

Bluestar interrupted him with a grunt. "Just in case, Oakheart. It's not likely."

With wide eyes, Whiteclaw nodded. "Yes, Bluestar," he repeated. "But you'll come back."

Bluestar dipped her head. "RiverClan!" She announced, padding to the entrance of the camp. "I will be leaving to find Thistleclaw and Lionkit and bring them back. Do not panic, I will find them both. Whiteclaw will look after the camp while I am gone!"

Feeling determined, Bluestar turned to the entrance of the camp. She took a deep breath and left her clanmates behind for what may

be forever.

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Bluestar trekked through RiverClan's forest, eyes narrowed. She followed Thistleclaw's scent to the border that RiverClan shared with ThunderClan. Bluestar bit her lip. Maybe Thistleclaw just went to ThunderClan camp and they're looking after Lionkit and holding him prisoner? She knew she was being naive as she followed the scent more. It went past ThunderClan territory and to the unknown. Bluestar realised that she was about to go far out of Clan territory, and squashed her doubts and anxieties down. She stepped off of ThunderClan territory and into who knows where.

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Bluestar padded through a grass field, beginning to shiver. Snow was falling harder now and she was worried she'd lose Thistleclaw's scent. She sped up, hoping the scent wouldn't disappear. Anxiety flooded her stomach, threatening to choke her. She sunk her claws into the ground, her teeth beginning to chatter. But he trudged on through the forest, still following Thistleclaw's scent. The snow began to fall faster and it became colder but she didn't dare stop and rest. Not when she had to find Thistleclaw and Lionkit. As she walked, she heard a yowl from someone.

For a second she was excited, thinking it was Thistleclaw or one of his cats, but realised a few moments after it was a stranger. A young tom trotted over to her with a curious expression on his face. "Hi! Who are you?" He asked. "Are you one of those forest cats?"

Bluestar studied the black and white tom thoughtfully. His questions were quiet and sincere, not overwhelming at all. "Yes, I am. My name is Bluestar. Who are you?"

The tom tipped his head to one side. "My name's Barley. Are you looking for the cat that passed here not too long ago? He had a little ginger kit with him. Big, battle-scarred, grey?"

Bluestar nodded. "Thistleclaw and Lionkit! Do you know which direction he went?"

Barley looked startled. "You're going after them in all this snow?"

The leader's expression was firm. "Yes. I need to find him. Did you ever see another group of cats, maybe three of them? A white tom, a tabby tom and a dark grey tom?"

Barley nodded. "Yeah. They were hurrying pretty fast, it seemed. They went that way," he meowed pointing with his tail in the direction Bluestar was walking, "As did the grey tom and the kit."

Bluestar purred, relieved. "Thank you, Barley. Where's your den?"

Barley shrugged. "I was thinking of moving into the barn over near the big moor. Looks comfy, but haven't really gotten around to it. There might be twolegs or other things."

Bluestar dipped her head. "Good luck. I've been in there before. If I weren't a warrior I'd probably live there. See you, Barley."

Barley smiled. "Thanks for the help. Good luck with who you're looking for!"

Bluestar dipped her head. "Thank you!" She called as she began to trek in the direction of Thistleclaw. She had to find him.

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Bluestar continued walking until she picked up more than two scents on the cold breeze. *Tigerclaw*? She thought disbelievingly, speeding up. She sprinted after the scent, desperate to catch Thistleclaw before anything worse happened.

Suddenly she skidded to a halt. Thistleclaw, Lionkit and Tigerclaw were right in front of her. Tigerclaw wasn't meeting Thistleclaw's eyes, shaking and looking scared. His ribs stuck out of his pelt, making Bluestar rather concerned.

Lionkit looked up at Thistleclaw sadly, looking like she was going to collapse. "I'm cold," she meowed through chattering teeth.

Thistleclaw ignored the kit, a smile appearing on his face.

"We're here."

Bluestar looked past Thistleclaw and saw Whitestorm and Darkstripe.

Oh, no.

Chapter Forty-Four

Bluestar watched quietly, praying to StarClan her scent was hidden by the snow. Whitestorm perked his head out of the cave and immediately went back inside. Bluestar heard a few muffled yowls and a few moments later Whitestorm and Darkstripe padded out of the den.

"Y-You found us? But how?" Whitestorm stammered, looking shocked.

Darkstripe let out a laugh. "I knew you'd come for us someday! And you did! It must've been a sign from StarClan!"

Thistleclaw let out a snort. "StarClan do not care about you, Darkstripe. How many times have I told you this?"

Darkstripe looked at his paws guiltily. "A lot of times," he mumbled. When he looked back up, his eyes shone. "But you found us! How?"

Thistleclaw puffed out his chest. "I used my brain, something that none of you have," he meowed. His gaze lit up with rage. "Cowards!" He spat. "Deserting me when I needed you most! I had to leave by myself and find you!"

Whitestorm met his gaze coolly. "Sorry, dad. We knew you'd come for us, and- Tigerclaw!" He broke off with a yowl, looking ecstatic. "You found him! He was with us but he disappeared while we were walking."

Tigerclaw didn't seem to notice that Whitestorm nuzzled his cheek. His eyes were glazed over and staring into the distance. "Yeah," he meowed distractedly.

Whitestorm recoiled, looking concerned. "Tigerclaw, are you- Oh, you've got a fever!" He gasped, giving him licks on the cheek.

"Come inside. You must be freezing."

Thistleclaw's eyes narrowed. "We aren't going in your little den," he growled.

"I'd like that," Tigerclaw mumbled, looking like he didn't know what he was agreeing to. Absentmindedly, he stumbled into the den.

Whitestorm glared at his father and then followed Tigerclaw, with Darkstripe trailing after. Reluctantly, Thistleclaw followed with a grumble.

Bluestar's eyes widened. Lionkit was here! She snuck closer to the den, staring intently at the little she-kit.

"Pst!" She whispered, eyes wide. "Lionkit!"

Lionkit looked terrified, turning her head to side to side. Then she turned around and saw Bluestar. She gave the leader a goofy grin and scampered over. "It was really scary," she whimpered quietly. "I don't like the big grey tom!"

"It's okay," Bluestar comforted, licking the kit between the ears. "You're with me now. Let's go."

"What about the scary cats?" Lionkit asked. "He said he'd get really mad at me if I ran away!"

"He won't find us," Bluestar murmured. "If he does, then I'll make sure you don't get hurt. Now, let's go!"

Nodding frantically, Lionkit scampered off. Bluestar glanced nervously at the den and then followed the she-kit.

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"Barley!" Bluestar meowed, exhausted. "I can't believe I found you!"

Barley got to his paws, looking at Bluestar in surprise with a mouse in his jaws. He put it on the ground and purred. "Bluestar, you're back. With the kit!"

Bluestar nodded. "Do you think you could look after her while I go do something?" She asked. "I found the cats I needed to find and brought Lionkit back."

Barley's eyes widened. "Oh, of course! I'm sorry, I didn't know she was abducted. If I knew, I promise you I would've made sure the cats didn't take her."

Bluestar smiled. "It's alright. You couldn't've known. But could you look after her for a bit?"

Barley gave the kit a lick. "Of course! I've got a nice juicy mouse for us to share, little one," he purred. "Just follow me."

Bluestar crouched down and looked at Lionkit, taking in her worried gaze. "I'll be back in a few minutes, alright? I just have to go see something. Barley will take care of you until I'm back."

Lionkit nodded and she got to her paws. She leaned close to Barley. "If I don't get back soon, bring her to the Clans. Just go that way and when you find a cat, ask where RiverClan is, alright?"

Barley nodded hesitantly. "You'll be fine," he meowed. "Good luck, Bluestar."

Bluestar nodded firmly. "Thank you, Barley. And thank you for looking after Lionkit."

Bluestar glanced at the little she-kit and then turned to run into the bushes.

--

"Are you ready?" Thistleclaw hissed, sounding impatient.

Bluestar stalked closer to the cats talking, eyes narrowed.

"I don't want to go to the moonstone, Thistleclaw," Tigerclaw meowed, his voice a whimper.

"Snap out of it!" Thistleclaw snarled, slashing Tigerclaw's shoulder.

Tigerclaw blinked, staring at Thistleclaw with blank eyes. "I've been on my own so long... So sick..." he murmured.

Whitestorm looked concerned for his friend, nudging him away from Thistleclaw. "Let's go," he meowed calmly. "We're going to ThunderClan, and we're going to be safe and sound."

Thistleclaw looked at his son disdainfully. "Right," he sniffed. "Darkstripe, let's go."

Darkstripe paused. "Wait. Thistleclaw, where's that kit? The one you arrived with?"

Thistleclaw shrugged. "Dead, probably. Does it matter?"

Bluestar's gaze hardened. How dare he talk like that about a kit?! As Thistleclaw padded off, Bluestar saw how she felt reflected in Darkstripe's appauled gaze.

Bluestar stepped back, ducking out of the way as Thistleclaw, Darkstripe, Tigerclaw and Whitestorm padded off. Eyes wide in alarm, she ran off. She was aware of Thistleclaw's head snapping up. "What was that?" He meowed.

"Just a mouse, probably," Whitestorm replied distractedly.

Their voices faded into the distance as Bluestar ran off. She ran into Barley's den. "Lionkit, come with me!" She meowed hurriedly. The kit ran over to her and she nodded to Barley. "Good luck with the barn. I hope to see you again."

Then she grabbed the she-kit and ran as fast as she could, through the woods and across the hills. She started to slow down as she neared RiverClan territory. She crossed the border, unable to relax. She rested Lionkit on the ground. "Follow me," she meowed urgently.

Lionkit smiled. "Good. I was beginning to hurt because of how you were holding me!"

The kit managed to keep up fairly well as Bluestar ran to camp. "You're almost home!" She called with a shiver. "To the warmth!"

Even if it were snowy, Bluestar could hardly feel it. She was beside herself in fear. She made it to the camp with Lionkit padding after her. The kit went right into the nursery, but Bluestar couldn't move once she made it to the entrance of the camp.

"Bluestar?" Whiteclaw asked, confused. "What's wrong?"

Bluestar stared at Whiteclaw. "He's coming. Him and Tigerclaw and Darkstripe and Whitestorm," she meowed, stumbling. She looked up at him, terrified.

"They're going to destroy RiverClan."

Chapter Forty-Five

Bluestar flicked her tail and once again, cats of RiverClan streamed into the gathering place. She led them down, eyes narrowed. She bounded across the hollow and with a mighty leap made it onto the great rock. Redstar, Brokenstar and Tallstar sat next to her. Bluestar dipped her head to Redstar. "Interesting looking at it like this, Redstar?"

Redstar nodded. "It really is, Bluestar. Wait-" He broke off with a snort. "Bluestar and Redstar! What a great time to be alive," he purred, tail waving happily.

Bluestar chuckled. "Is ThunderClan recovering alright?" She asked with a tip of her head. "And... Fireblaze is still being kept as a prisoner?"

Redstar nodded firmly. "ThunderClan is fine and Fireblaze is being guarded heavily. And Thistleclaw...?"

Bluestar looked away. "Should we start the gathering now?" She asked.

The leaders nodded. First of all, Tallstar stepped forward. "WindClan is doing well and we have been healing after an unprovoked attack from ShadowClan. We thank RiverClan for helping us with driving them out of our camp, and we hope Brokenstar won't attack us again."

Brokenstar narrowed his eyes at the challenge in Tallstar's voice and then stepped forward. "ShadowClan is well. We have not much to report, only that our cats are well and prey is fine."

Mudclaw of WindClan snorted loudly. "Yeah right, prey is fine in leaf-bare!"

Brokenstar looked like he was going to leap at the WindClan warrior, but he barely managed to control himself. He ignored the tom, not replying and looking expectantly at Redstar. "You may go next."

Redstar dipped his head and stepped forward. "ThunderClan has been recovering from the damage Thistlestar, or Thistleclaw, has done. Whitestorm, Spottedleaf, Tigerclaw and Darkstripe have disappeared and have probably left the Clans. We are also keeping Fireblaze a prisoner in our camp. He is heavily guarded and will not escape. I am now Redstar and my deputy is Runningwind. Our medicine cat apprentice, being trained by StarClan, is Brightpaw."

"Redstar! Runningwind! Brightpaw!" The clan cats cheered.

Bluestar smiled warmly at Redstar, stepping forward. "RiverClan has been doing well. My new deputy is Whiteclaw and we have a new warrior, Reedheart."

"Whiteclaw! Reedheart! Whiteclaw! Reedheart!"

Bluestar looked down at her paws guiltily. "But... While we were helping WindClan, Thistleclaw escaped. We don't know how, but he took a kit with him. I followed his scent and found Lionkit and him. He found Tigerclaw, Darkstripe and Whitestorm. I managed to get Lionkit and found out what he was doing. He will be... coming back with them soon."

Yowls started erupting from the crowd. Bluestar looked at the other leaders. Redstar and Tallstar looked scared and Brokenstar had a smile on his face. "I'm glad that Clawface managed to succeed," he meowed calmly with a glint in his amber eyes and a grin on his flat face.

Yellowfang, the medicine cat of ShadowClan, got to her paws. "How dare you?!" She yowled. "He will try to destroy the Clans again!"

Blackfoot, the deputy of ShadowClan, stared at the medicine cat, getting her to sit down. "Maybe Bluestar should have guarded her camp more. It was strangely easy," he meowed innocently.

Bluestar's eyes blazed. "Pardon me?" She snarled.

Blackfoot met her gaze unflinchingly. "You heard me," he meowed coolly.

Bluestar sunk her claws into the ground. She glared at the tom. Blackfoot looked back nonchalantly. "I'm just saying, how guarded is your camp if a ShadowClan warrior could stroll in and take a murderous prisoner?"

Bluestar's eyes narrowed. "Why would ShadowClan be trying to take a murderous prisoner in the first place?"

Blackfoot didn't reply, a scowl on his face. He looked away.

Redstar looked at Brokenstar curiously. "Yes, why did you take Thistleclaw?" He meowed in a low voice, eyes narrowed dangerously.

Brokenstar examined his claws. "Because I believe it'd be more fun," he meowed simply.

Tallstar looked like he was on the verge of leaping at Brokenstar and tearing out his throat. He inhaled deeply to calm himself. "You let loose a murderer because you thought it would be more *fun*?"

Brokenstar didn't seem at all bothered by Tallstar's question. "Yes. He made life fun and interesting. I liked the drama."

Tallstar's eyes flashed. "So you didn't care about cats dying, family members losing their kits or siblings or parents. You just thought it fun?"

Brokenstar yawned. "Yes, of course."

Bluestar snarled. The way Brokenstar talked made it seem like it was the most obvious thing in the world. Her claws sunk into the rock. "What if he kills you?"

Brokenstar looked at her in surprise. He chuckled. "Oh, of course he won't," he let out a mrrow of amusement. "We have an alliance. Only a fool would betray me. I'll be on his side. With him and his

rogues and maybe even cats of the other Clans who agree with him!"

Cats in the crowd began to look at each other warily, looking paranoid. Bluestar snorted. "None of RiverClan's cats will join you or Thistlestar. We are loyal!"

Brokenstar grinned. "How do you think that we obtained Thistleclaw so easily?" He responded with a smirk.

Bluestar's mouth went dry and she found herself unable to reply. She stared at Brokenstar in surprise, suspense in the air. "B-But, my Clanmates would never..." she stammered, her words drifting away.

Brokenstar's crooked tail lashed. "All I'm saying," he purred. "Is to keep a close eye on your Clanmates."

Bluestar backed away as Brokenstar walked towards her and felt her leg slipping off of the highrock. Pebbles and grit tumbled down to the bottom and she looked down with a horrible lurch in her stomach. Ignoring the anxiety, she turned and met Brokenstar's malicious, intense gaze unflinchingly.

The two stayed glowering at each other before Brokenstar stepped back. Bluestar's ears pricked and she heard a rustle in the bushes nearby. She nearly turned and looked, but realised that she would probably slip and break her neck if she stopped focusing on staying in place. She got up as Brokenstar padded off, a smug look on the tabby tom's face. "He's here!" He chirped in a rather sing-song voice.

The rustle grew louder and Thistleclaw strode out of the bushes, followed by Whitestorm, Tigerclaw, Darkstripe, Spottedleaf and a bunch of other strange cats with kittypet collars Bluestar didn't recognise.

"Hello, everyone," Thistleclaw boomed.

Chapter Forty-Six

Thistleclaw strode through the crowd with a Whitestorm, a large light grey tom who looked menacing and scary, and a small apprentice-sized black tom. Bluestar gulped. The strangers' claws were long and sharp and when Bluestar got a better look she realised with a pang of dread that the cats' paws were fixed with dogs teeth and claws.

She squinted. The small black tom looked familiar. His icy blue eyes and the colour of his collar... she felt she had seen him before.

Thistleclaw leapt up onto the great rock with ease. He smiled charmingly at Bluestar as Whitestorm and the two other cats leapt up onto the rock. Bluestar heard the murmuring of cats down in the crowd, some suspicious and some anxious.

"Bluestar, Brokenstar, Tallstar and... Redtail," Thistleclaw meowed, eyes narrowing at the last name.

Redstar growled at Thistleclaw. "Actually, I'm Red*star* now."

Thistleclaw rolled his eyes. "Good for you," he grunted with a lash of his tail.

"Who is this?" Tallstar asked with a confused look at the black tom. "Is he a healer, or...?"

Thistleclaw snorted. "Oh, we don't need a healer!" He snorted. "We have Spottedleaf. This is Bone and Scourge. Scourge is BloodClan's leader."

Redstar took a step back. "BloodClan...?"

"A group of cats that live in the alleys of twolegplace. I have told them that once you join me, we can all share the forest together."

"What a charming thought," Tallstar muttered.

Bluestar didn't reply. He looked at the black tom who was glaring at Thistleclaw. "I can speak for myself," he hissed, his voice icy cold.

Then he met Bluestar's eyes and a surprised look crossed his face. Bluestar suddenly realised what was so familiar about the black tom.

"You were the kittypet," she murmured in surprise.

Scourge sunk his claws deep into the rock. He gave Bluestar a curt nod and looked at Brokenstar. "I was told one of you would be joining us...?"

Brokenstar stepped forward with a smile. "ShadowClan will be allying with Thistleclaw and BloodClan."

Gasps came from the audience of cats. ShadowClan cats looked terrified, furious and even triumphant. Yellowfang stared at Brokenstar with indescribable emotion. She looked terrified and yet looked like she had given up.

"Now," Thistleclaw snarled, tail lashing. "Redstar, Tallstar and Bluestar. This is your last chance. Join us in TigerClan or you will pay."

Bluestar's eyes narrowed. She opened her jaws to react to Thistleclaw's question- or was it a statement? Either way, she wasn't feeling positive about what the grey tom said, she was sure of that.

But she wasn't able to reply for a few moments, as she faintly felt a cat wind itself around her. She could feel the negative energy radiating off of the stranger in overwhelming waves. She didn't manage to answer, just glowering at the ex-leader until he got what she was saying. The strange presence had made it feel like something was lodged in her throat, making her unable to speak.

Thistleclaw snarled at her, then turned to Redstar and Tallstar. "And you two?"

Redstar's eyes narrowed and Tallstar gave Thistleclaw a wry smile.

"No, we won't," Redstar meowed firmly, gaze giving away nothing.

Tallstar let out a huff of amusement. "Do you really think we'd agree after we said we would never join you?"

Thistleclaw looked absolutely furious. "At least one of you is smart," he growled.

The black tom stepped forward. "I am Scourge," he meowed. "Thistleclaw is right. My cats and I can slice you open from your neck to your tail if we please."

Bluestar felt sick. "What?" She managed to splutter, shock causing her body to freeze.

Thistleclaw smiled sadistically. "You heard him. If you don't join us, Scourge and BloodClan will slaughter all three of you as many times as it takes."

The presence around her began to take form, and Bluestar felt even sicker as she realised who it was. The cat pulled away, a grin lighting up its - or her - face. Her amber eyes sparkled and her tail lashed.

"You're finally getting what you deserve," the she-cat rasped. "I'm so excited."

Bluestar nearly scowled but didn't want to seem insane. *Mapleshade*, she thought furiously. *Why are you here?*

Mapleshade grinned. "To see you die," she replied.

Great, Bluestar thought awkwardly, ignoring the she-cat by staring through her. *Now she can read my mind.*

Thistleclaw was staring at her in rage. "This is your last chance," he snarled. "Will you join us, or die?"

Bluestar responded immediately. "I'd rather die," she snarled, hearing a quiet chortle from Mapleshade who was now sitting next to her.

She turned her head away from the dead spirit to see Redstar and Tallstar nodding along approvingly. "Bluestar's right," Redstar meowed calmly.

Thistleclaw looked so fuming that he could explode any moment. "Of course," he meowed, his desperate attempt to keep his tone level and intact failing as his voice cracked. "Well then. I guess Scourge here will have to kill you."

Bone looked at Thistleclaw blankly. "We don't take orders from anyone but Scourge," he growled.

Thistleclaw rolled his eyes. "Fine then. Whenever *Scourge* is ready," he spat sarcastically.

Scourge narrowed his eyes. He murmured something in Bone's ear. Bluestar could only make out a few words. *Kill her?* She thought with a sinking feeling in her stomach. Does he mean me in particular?

Bone nodded, staring at her and confirming her anxieties. *Scourge wants to kill me.*

She turned to Mapleshade but the she-cat was gone, sitting at the front of the crowd with an amused expression on her face. Bluestar turned back to Bone and returned his gaze, tail tip twitching.

Redstar yawned. "Well, if you're going to attack and kill all of us, get it over with. Otherwise I'll be taking ThunderClan back home."

Thistleclaw snarled. "Oh no you won't-"

Scourge silenced Thistleclaw with a glare, turning back with the faintest triumphant and amused tint in his eye. He got to his paws and Bluestar stared disbelievingly. This tom was the size of Thistleclaw when the black tom stood and the grey warrior sat and yet he had the power to start a war and kill cats.

Scourge stared ahead distantly, a small smile on his face. "BloodClan," he meowed icily, staring at the crowd of BloodClan cats near the edges of the gathering hollow.

"Attack."

Chapter Forty-Seven

Thistleclaw padded into an alleyway with Boulder of ShadowClan in the lead. Tigerclaw stumbled along next to him, to Thistleclaw's disgust. He didn't even want to find that traitor. He'd heard the brown tabby's treasonous words, trying to poison his own son, and he much preferred the idea of killing him right here and now.

But Whitestorm would be devastated. If he wanted his son to stay loyal to him, he had to let Tigerclaw live, even if it was reluctantly. He looked sideways at the tom. His gaze had cleared, but his ribs still stuck out and his eyes were full of rage and fury. *You deserve this sickness, this insanity*, he thought. Even he thought it a bit far to think that and silently apologised.

"We're here," Boulder meowed, looking positively terrified. He flinched as a large light grey tom stalked towards him.

"Boulder," he snarled. "What are you doing here?"

"I-I came to see Scourge," Boulder stuttered. "I've got Clan visitors."

The light grey tom took a step forward, but a cold voice interrupted him before he could attack.

"Bone, move out the way," the voice mewed, and Bone obediently stepped away to reveal a small black tom sitting on top of a twoleg storage box. He leapt down and stared at Boulder coldly.

"You have come back after all this time?" Scourge hissed. Then his icy blue eyes widened as he saw Tigerclaw and Thistleclaw and he let out a coldhearted laugh.

"Clan cats. What do you want?" He mewed.

Thistleclaw shouldered Tigerclaw harshly and stepped forward.

"Scourge," he greeted. His claws sunk into the stone floor.

"I have a proposition for you."

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Bluestar watched in surprise as cats from all four - or five - Clans came rushing at each other below her. BloodClan cats took on WindClan and ThunderClan cats, meanwhile more ThunderClan cats fought next to BloodClan cats. She glimpsed Fireblaze sprinting into the whirlpool of cats with a BloodClan cat racing next to him. She was distracted from what was happening in the hollow by Tigerclaw scrambling onto the great rock. He stared at Whitestorm clearly, the glazed over look Bluestar glimpsed before gone.

"What are you doing?!" He yowled over the fighting noises. "Standing with him of all cats?!"

Whitestorm looked confused. "What-"

Tigerclaw leapt onto Whitestorm and pinned him down. "You're on the traitor's side!" He screeched.

Whitestorm stared up at his friend with wide eyes. "Tigerclaw, what are you talking about?! He's my father!"

Tigerclaw spat in Whitestorm's face. "He's a murderer and a traitor is all he is! He doesn't love you!"

Bluestar, unnerved from the insanity in Tigerclaw's gaze, took a step away from the fighting toms. She stared at the other leaders and then leapt off of the highrock and down to the fighting.

She was almost immediately tackled by a grey tom Bluestar recognised as Greystrike of ThunderClan. The warrior pinned her down and spat in her face. Bluestar managed to push him off, giving him a scratch on the cheek as she did. Greystrike snarled and slashed at her muzzle, slicing a bit of her nose open.

The two stared at each other now, tails lashing. Greystrike fell into a crouch and leapt. Mid-leap, he was pushed over by a black tom of ThunderClan called Ravenscreech. The two toms tussled in the

ground until Ravenscreech leapt away and swiped at Greystrike's front paws, knocking him over. He scratched Greystrike's belly fur, making him yowl in pain. Ears flattened to his head, the grey tom leapt to his paws and ran off to fight someone else.

Bluestar smiled gratefully at Ravenscreech, who gave her a nod. "I can't believe Greystrike would be one of the traitors," Ravenscreech mewed grimly. "Good luck, Bluestar."

The leader watched as Ravenscreech went off to drive off another traitor. She spun around as Sandstorm and Fireblaze nearly bowled her over as they fought. Sandstorm looked pained and terrified and Fireblaze looked furious. As they passed, Bluestar managed to leap at Fireblaze and tackle him off of the she-cat. Fireblaze stared up at her in surprise and for a second Bluestar saw the gentle face she had only seen in visions of alternate universes.

But the softness was gone after a moment, so fast Bluestar wondered if it was real, and Fireblaze looked furious again, pushing her off of him and pinning her down.

Bluestar went limp and stared up at Fireblaze defeatedly. Fireblaze looked down, eyes glimmering triumphantly, and didn't expect Bluestar to shove him off and bite on his ear. He let out a screech as Bluestar ripped a bit off. Ouch, she thought as blood ran down Fireblaze's ear and face. That must hurt.

Then a relieved look crossed Fireblaze's expression. Before Bluestar could turn to see what he was happy about, Spottedleaf leapt onto her, scratching at her belly with her hind paws and biting on her ear. Bluestar screeched in pain, struggling to get the ex-medicine cat off of her.

But she did and she managed to kick her into Fireblaze, knocking the two of them down. She stared down at the two dazed cats, gaze emotionless. She looked up to see Sandstorm, eyes full of rage and claws unsheathed. For a second Bluestar was nervous she was going to leap at him just as Spottedleaf and Fireblaze did, but she had respect in her gaze as she padded over and stared at Bluestar. "I'll take care of him," she mewed coldly as she stared down at Fireblaze. The ginger tom struggled to move Spottedleaf out of the

way.

Bluestar nodded and turned to fight another cat. She found in front of her Brokenstar and Scourge. She backed away as Brokenstar leapt at him and Scourge ripped him open, head to tail. She let out a screech at the event happening right before her.

Brokenstar fell to the ground and didn't stir. Bluestar waited for him to get up. He had nine lives left, after all. But he didn't. With a sinking feeling, Bluestar realised what had happened. She stared up at Scourge with newfound fear growing. It felt like the feeling was strangling her, making her unable to breathe.

Scourge was able to take a leader's nine lives, all at the same time.

Chapter Forty-Eight

Bluestar stumbled. The clearing had gone silent. Cats from the Clans gathered around Brokenstar. Most of them didn't respect him- some downright hated him- but they all shared the thought that he didn't deserve to die that way. Thistleclaw ran over to Scourge, eyes lit up in fury. "He was our ally!" He snarled. "Why did you do that?"

Scourge stared blankly at Thistleclaw. "He provoked me," he meowed coolly. "He said he was going to kill me and I was a kittypet and no older than a kit."

Thistleclaw's eyes widened. Even he knew how much of a mistake that would be. He reluctantly dipped his head. "Fine. Blackfoot will lead ShadowClan then."

"Blackfoot is dead too," Bone growled.

For a second, fear flashed in Thistleclaw's eyes, to be replaced by the familiar arrogance Bluestar had grown used to. He backed away and spun around, leaping away and starting the battle up again. Bluestar stared at Scourge and Brokenstar for a moment longer, horrified that his cruel death was pushed away in this horrible battle.

But she didn't have time to think, as Whitestorm shoved her over and pinned her down fiercely, staring down with fury flaring in his amber eyes. "It's time for you to die!" He snarled. sinking his claws into her throat.

"Whitestorm, please!" Bluestar choked out desperately. "Can't you see what you're doing?"

Whitestorm looked blinded by fury, sinking his claws in deeper. "Yes, I can. I am finally giving you what you deserve!"

Bluestar couldn't breathe. She just stared up at Whitestorm with terror in her eyes. Whitestorm stared back with a kind of scary grin on his face. "Finally you will pay for what you did. How you made me feel. Why can't you understand how horrible I felt afterwards? I blamed and hated myself because you left me! Thistleclaw was all I had. That's why I 'ended up like him', as you'd say. Because you abandoned me!"

Bluestar tried to make Whitestorm let go of her. His grip loosened and Bluestar realised his eyes were shining with emotion and he didn't really want to kill her. She inhaled deeply and then looked up at her nephew sympathetically.

"Oh, Whitestorm. I never meant to do any of that. I never knew it would make you feel that way. I always thought you could come and join me if you wanted to," she murmured. "I've loved you so much as you grew up and I feel like it's such wasted potential that all of your strengths are being used for evil."

Whitestorm's eyes glazed over and he sheathed his claws, staring down at Bluestar. "I've always thought Thistleclaw was evil- I'm not stupid. It's just I've always felt obligated to be with him and by his side because he's my father. But... Maybe I don't have to."

Bluestar smiled. "You don't. Come to RiverClan. You can be happy with Willowpelt and your kits. The first step is... letting me up?"

Whitestorm's eyes flashed with surprise. "Oh, of course-agh!"

His mew was cut off as Willowpelt leapt at him and pinned him into the ground. "You!" She snarled. "How dare you! I was your mate and we had kits and you left us!"

Whitestorm's eyes widened. "So that's how it felt..." he mumbled, before raising his voice. "Willowpelt, please! I don't want to harm you anymore! I want to join you in RiverClan, and-"

His yowl was cut off as Willowpelt bit into his throat. She didn't stop, her eyes glistening with the fury of a mother that was unloved by her mate. Whitestorm went limp and Willowpelt stepped away, gaze full of emotion. "He's dead," she murmured. "I killed him."

A bit of Bluestar felt like leaping at Willowpelt and saying the grey she-cat's mate had changed, but she knew that would be a horrible thing to do to a grieving queen. She padded over, stricken by grief and taken aback that it all happened so fast, and rested her tail on Willowpelt's shoulder. "He'll be in StarClan," she murmured, hoping it was true.

"Will he be, though?" Willowpelt asked. Bluestar was surprised that there was no bitterness in her voice, only deep regret and sadness. She must've still loved Whitestorm after everything.

"I'm sure of it," Bluestar whispered. "I promise."

Her words comforted Willowpelt a bit, or at least Bluestar hoped, because she nodded and sprang away to fight. Bluestar saw Tigerclaw stumbling over to Whitestorm, looking distraught. He had scratches all over and his eyes were glazed. He stared at the body and then turned to Thistleclaw who was looking at his son with no emotion in his gaze.

"How dare you!" Tigerclaw screeched. "It's because of you that your son died! It's all you! Foxheart!"

Thistleclaw met Tigerclaw's gaze evenly. "It isn't my fault," he meowed calmly. "It's her's."

He pointed with his tail to Willowpelt, who was now up and on her paws, meeting the brown tabby's eyes.

Tigerclaw sunk his claws into the ground and Bluestar flinched away. The brown tabby looked insane. His shining amber eyes were so wild and terrifying. "You made all of this happen, you snakeheart!" He screamed, leaping at Thistleclaw.

The grey tom was ready and merely lifted a paw, slashing it across Tigerclaw's throat. With a strange choking noise, the brown tabby tom crumpled to the ground with a thump. He stared up at Thistleclaw, a surprised expression permanently etched on his face. Thistleclaw looked up from Tigerclaw's dying body, staring right at Bluestar. Tigerclaw tried to talk but made a gurgling noise instead as blood filled his throat and mouth. Bluestar watched sadly. In his

last moons of life, Tigerclaw had seemed so troubled and sad. What had happened to make him feel that way?

She met Thistleclaw's gaze, tail lashing. "You killed him. He was your apprentice," she choked out.

Thistleclaw licked the blood from the paw he slaughtered Tigerclaw with. "He betrayed me," he replied simply, tail tip twitching.

Bluestar suddenly felt overwhelmed. The cat standing in front of her was a heartless killer, not caring if his own son died and killing the cat he trained for moons and moons.

He didn't care about anyone.

"You and me," Thistleclaw meowed calmly. "We both have one life. We fight to the death."

The grey tom raised his voice. Cats began to stop fighting to stare at him. "If I win, BloodClan and ShadowClan call off their warriors. If she wins, WindClan, ThunderClan and RiverClan join to become TigerClan. Either way, the battle will be over. Are you up for it, Bluestar?"

Feeling peer pressured, Bluestar reluctantly agreed. "Yes, Thistleclaw," she meowed, raising her voice in a vow that she desperately hoped wouldn't be broken.

"And I promise, I will kill you."

Chapter Forty-Nine

Bluestar stared at Thistleclaw. Neither of the two cats made a move. They just stared at each other, walking in circles.

Thistleclaw's eyes narrowed. "You think you can kill me, hm? What, because you have StarClan on your side or some foxdung?"

Bluestar scowled. "Because I have been training to kill you," she hissed, sinking her claws into the ground.

Thistleclaw's mouth twisted into a sneer. "You seem a bit obsessed, Bluestar," he hissed. "You might need some help!"

Bluestar didn't reply, glowering at the large-pawed grey tom. Looking satisfied, Thistleclaw's tail raised in the air and he let out a purr of satisfaction.

"Nothing to reply, hm? Does that mean that you agree with me?" He asked with a grin.

Bluestar leapt at him, attempting to bowl him over but failing. The tom jumped out of the way. "How sad," he taunted with a twinkle in his eyes. "Any cat who tries to fight you can win easily because of how slow and weak you are!"

Furious, Bluestar swiped at Thistleclaw's cheek, satisfied when he let out a yelp and leapt back. Cats had begun to fight again after listening to the bet and watching as the two began to battle. Bluestar leapt back as Thistleclaw tried to retaliate, attempting to give the she-cat a slice on the muzzle.

Adrenaline helped Bluestar stay focused on the battle. Her wounds hurt like fire but she managed to ignore them so that she could be sure she would kill Thistleclaw once and for all.

Thistleclaw snarled at Bluestar, all charm and scorn gone in his eyes, to be replaced by fury and concentration. Quick as a snake he spun around her and bit onto her tail, slashing at a hind leg as well. Bluestar let out a screech of pain, whirling around and giving Thistleclaw a whack on the head. The tom scowled and jumped back, almost immediately pouncing at Bluestar again.

Bluestar's eyes widened. *He's strong*, she thought. *And fast. It's been a while since you fought him last. But you can beat him. Just... think like a fox.* Bluestar managed to duck, Thistleclaw missing by a whisker and landing on the ground with a thump. "Now who's the slow one?" She meowed coolly, no humour in her tone.

Thistleclaw ignored her and leapt up to his paws, aiming a blow at her ear. She recoiled fast, the claws hitting the edge and still making her let out a hiss of pain. She attempted once more to bowl over the grey tom.

When he's up on his paws, you're in more danger, she realised.

This time though, she managed to pin him down, pushing him down so that his struggles were in vain. She sunk her claws into one shoulder and bit into another, making him yowl. He stared up at her, eyes wide in terror.

Bluestar sunk her claws in deeper, eyes glistening with fury. *You've done it. You're going to win,* she thought, relieved. She bit down into Thistleclaw's neck, but as his eyes began to glaze over a force from beside her pushed her over. She fell to the ground, looking around wildly for who interfered with the fight and saw a very faint Mapleshade, staring at her with a grin plastered on her face.

Bluestar gazed back in surprise, scowling at the she-cat. She opened her jaws to confront her, but she was gone.

Suddenly Thistleclaw leapt at her from behind and managed to pin her down. She struggled under the tom's weight, snarling. Thistleclaw gave Bluestar a cruel grin, drops of blood from his throat landing on her chest and face. "You almost killed me," he meowed, his voice barely a whisper. "But you weren't good enough. Say hi to Snowfur from me in StarClan."

Bluestar felt she was slowly getting strangled, Thistleclaw's paws pressing down on it firmly. She choked out incomprehensible, pleading words, but it didn't work. Thistleclaw's strength didn't falter and Bluestar could feel herself slipping away. *Just let go*, she thought to herself. The screeches of battle faded away and all she could focus on was her vision blurring and the black blots beginning to seep into everything.

Thistleclaw let go.

Hastily, Bluestar opened an eye and stumbled to her paws. "Thistleclaw...?" She rasped, the blurriness beginning to clear. Thistleclaw was next to her, amber eyes wide in terror. Bluestar watched, eyes wide, as Scourge leapt at Brightflower with claws out. Brightflower lifted a paw and slashed it along Scourge's throat. He let out a choking noise and spat out some blood, collapsing in front of the she-cat.

Bluestar ran over and crouched down in front of the tom, gaze cold.

Scourge opened an icy eye. For once his gaze held emotion. "Thank you," he hissed. "For saving me. I asked Bone and the other BloodClan cats not to attack you..."

Bluestar recoiled, eyes wide. "What?"

"If... we survived, we guaranteed your survival too but... An eye for an eye and a life for a life," Scourge finished, raising a shaky paw.

Bluestar thought for a second about what the black tom meant and realised with a sinking feeling he was going to try to kill her. With all the force and strength he could muster he slashed at Bluestar's neck.

Bluestar jumped back and narrowly missed as Scourge attempted to kill her. His eyes glittered with fury and he looked like he was going to finish the work he began, but before he could try, he fell limp.

Bluestar watched Scourge as his eyes dulled and his head rested against the bloody grass. Bluestar looked up at Brightflower in

surprise. "You killed him," she murmured.

Brightflower looked back with Bluestar's astonishment reflected in her eyes. "I... I did it," she murmured.

Yellowfang, the medicine cat of ShadowClan, came bursting out of the bushes and buried her muzzle into Brightflower's cheek. "I was so worried you died," she choked out. "How dare you take on the leader of BloodClan?!"

Brightflower comforted her daughter and Bluestar watched happily. She watched with a smile.

Then, suddenly, she turned her head around to see Thistleclaw leaping at her. In self-defence, she raised a paw.

And her claws scored across Thistleclaw's throat.

Chapter Fifty/Epilogue

A/N: I'm planning on making a comic with this chapter like the comics at the end of the super editions of Warriors!! So when I have free time I'll work on that!!!!

Bluestar lay down in her nest, a small smile on her face. She closed her eyes, laying there and not doing anything else, lying still as a statue.

She was drifting off to sleep when Whiteclaw padded into the den. "Bluestar?" He meowed anxiously. After a few seconds, he called again, his voice even more scared. "B-Bluestar?"

Bluestar raised her head. "Whiteclaw?" She rasped.

"Brightstar's here," Whiteclaw meowed, sounding relieved and a little awkward.

Bluestar lay her head on her paws. "You can represent me," she murmured. "I can barely get out of this nest anyways."

It had been seasons since Bluestar killed Thistleclaw and the Clans had been safe. BloodClan had retreated and Brightflower, who had killed Scourge, had become the leader of ShadowClan. She had killed Thistleclaw and saved the Clans from his reign. Afterwards, there had been no more battles. A small border skirmish here and there but nothing much else. The Clans had been in peace.

Whiteclaw shifted his paws. "Should I get Mossdapple?" He asked quietly.

Bluestar saw a cat next to Whiteclaw. "Get Mistyfoot and Sunpaw as well," she rasped. "Tell Brightstar to come back another time."

Whiteclaw's eyes widened as if he knew what was happening. He dipped his head. "I'll get Reedheart too," he murmured.

Bluestar nodded weakly. She stared as a cat appeared next to her.

"Mapleshade. I haven't seen you in a while," she murmured.

Mapleshade glared at Bluestar, sitting down. "You're dying," she sneered.

Bluestar stared back at Mapleshade, her vision hazy. "You don't say," she murmured.

Mapleshade scowled. "Would you like to see Greystrike and Fireblaze? They'll say goodbye."

Bluestar snorted weakly. "No."

Fireblaze and Greystrike, Bluestar thought, remembering the battle once more. *They died of blood loss and were said to have gone to the dark forest. Sandstorm had Fireblaze's kits, didn't she? Squirrelheart and Brightleaf's medicine cat apprentice, Leafblossom. Now Fireblaze and Greystrike are with Thistleclaw, Darkstripe, Spottedleaf and Mapleshade.*

A pang of worry formed once more in Bluestar's stomach. *I never found out where Tigerclaw and Whitestorm went. Maybe I'll see them when...*

She looked up at Mapleshade. "Leave me," Bluestar hissed. "When I go to StarClan I want to be surrounded by kin and loved ones."

Mapleshade glowered at her, fading. "Kin and loved ones," she muttered mutinously. "Foxheart."

When Mapleshade was gone, Bluestar lay down once more, the world beginning to fade. Stay strong, she thought to herself. They'll be here soon.

And sure enough, her friends and family were. Sunpaw padded in, looking at Bluestar with wide, horrified eyes. Mossdapple padded in after her, faster. She buried her muzzle in Bluestar's scruff. "Bluestar!"

Bluestar purred weakly as Mistyfoot and Reedheart came in, followed by Whiteclaw. All of them looked subdued and sad as they stared at her.

"Do I really look that weak?" She joked, breaking off with a cough.

No-one laughed. They stared at her with glazed eyes. Bluestar smiled sadly. "At least I'll be seeing Oakheart soon. I've missed him so much."

Oakheart, Bluestar thought, closing her eyes. *I've missed you so much, my love. I'm coming for you.*

Suddenly she thought about Spottedleaf and Oakheart, the two fighting and both of them lying dead in pools of blood.

Bluestar shook the horrible image, opening her eyes again to look at her kin. "Mistyfoot, Mossdapple, you've both grown up so much and I'm so proud of you. Oakheart would be too..."

Mistyfoot buried her nose deeper. "Don't talk. Don't waste your breath."

Bluestar nearly fell asleep but forced herself to stay strong. "Sunpaw, I'm so sorry I have to leave you. I love you so much and you're going to grow up and do such great things-" she broke off with a cough.

"Reedheart, I remember when I saved you as a small kit. You've grown... so much since then and become a warrior RiverClan can be proud of," Bluestar continued weakly, her vision beginning to fade into blackness.

"And Whiteclaw," she whispered. "You're going to be such an amazing leader..."

Whiteclaw let out a sob. "Don't go!"

Bluestar smiled. "Oakheart," she murmured. "He's here. And Stonefur."

She closed her eyes. "It's time for me to go. Goodbye everyone, and thank you."

Bluestar closed her eyes and let the darkness wash over her.

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Bluestar woke up in the leader's den but no one could see her. A brown tom stood in front of him with eyes shining. "Oakheart," Bluestar whispered, running toward him.

"Come with me," Oakheart meowed gently.

Bluestar nodded quietly. More and more cats appeared that Bluestar knew, making her almost tear up.

"Let's go," Snowfur purred, touching noses with Bluestar.

The rest of the cats started to disappear, and Bluestar felt her go with them. Sighing contently, she left behind the life she had lived for so long to be happy and safe in StarClan.

She had defeated Thistleclaw, and the Clans were safe.

She had succeeded.

THE END